

# Future Voice

**Editorial pages: Newspapers'  
overlooked strategic tool**

By Lynell Burkett

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to the team at NMC, Northwestern University's Media Management Center, and to the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, which funds the Editorial Leadership Initiative at NMC. This book resulted from a dream assignment made possible through ELI, which enabled me to spend five months as editor-in-residence at NMC, traveling to visit 18 newspapers throughout the nation.

In particular, I would like to thank NMC Director John Lavine, Managing Director Mike Smith, and Stacy Lynch, project manager for ELI, for their excellent suggestions and constant encouragement, and Steven S. Duke, who pushed the finished product through to publication. In addition, my deep appreciation goes to those who are interviewed in these pages, as well as others, unnamed within the text, who talked with me and whose ideas contributed to the book's completion. It goes as well to my husband, colleagues at the *Express-News* and leadership at Hearst Newspapers, who supported my efforts.

*-Lynnell Burkett San  
Antonio, August 1999*

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# Introduction

Lynell Burkett

On a trip to the nation's capital, I stopped for lunch at a restaurant near Dupont Circle that no journalist could have resisted. Its green-and-white striped awning proclaimed the name "The Front Page." True to promise, the comfortable surroundings were accented with front pages of the nation's newspapers that, taken together, provide remarkable highlights of the nation's history during the last half of this century. After lunch, I hopped the Metro to Rosslyn, Va., across the Potomac River, to visit the Freedom Forum's showplace, the Newseum, a museum of media history. For the next two hours I remained glued to its News History Gallery that, once again, gave highlights of the nation's history through the front pages of its newspapers.

After four months of research that took me from coast to coast, one afternoon's experiences confirmed for me the validity of my own bias: Yes, newspapers have a bright future. How could they not? They are so inextricably linked to the development of the nation.

The Newseum's News History Gallery gives radio and television their due. Audio and videotapes help document—with even greater drama than their print counterparts—major breaking news stories of the past half-century. But they have supplanted, rather than replaced, newspapers. The media have evolved together and continue to evolve as they make room for even newer methods of communication.

Newspapers remain relevant because they enjoy a number of competitive advantages over other media. No advantage is more important than the opportunity that they have to connect with their communities and make positive differences in the lives of their readers.

Yes, newspapers could fail—and disappear—in the coming decades. But I've come to think that will happen only if newspaper leaders truly "blow it," only if arrogance, shortsightedness and self-satisfaction prevent them from moving decisively to meet the next century's challenges. But interviews that I've conducted with industry leaders leave me optimistic that the best of them will not be complacent. They know what is required of them, and many of them relish the challenge.

I came to this study during a sabbatical from my career as leader of the opinion section and director of editorial policy of a major daily newspaper. Many of my colleagues and I think that the opinion section is too often underappreciated as part of a newspaper's strategic future. Our counterparts in the newsroom are the 900-pound gorillas commanding the bulk of attention and resources. Two of my editorial page colleagues at major newspapers confess that in their former lives in newsrooms they, too, had ignored or disdained the editorial pages. Only after having been named to lead the departments did they come to realize the section's importance. One, Howell Raines, now directs what is arguably the nation's most influential editorial page, that of *The New York Times*.

But my research indicates that many industry leaders do value the importance of the editorial pages, understanding that analysis and opinion offer one of the most potent strategic advantages of the newspaper over other media. I visited many newspapers that are undertaking a variety of creative projects and strategies to better connect with their communities, many of them rooted in the editorial page departments. I hope those who read this book will gain a

clearer view of how newspapers can realize their full potential in the coming century, and how those papers can help transform their communities. I hope, also, that those who lead newspapers will better understand the critical role of editorial pages in fully achieving their organizations' potential. If so, when the Newseum expands its wall of news to include that of the 21st century, the nation's history will once again be told through the pages of its daily newspapers.

# The Future of Newspapers

During the last decade, everyone in the newspaper business—from publishers to the newest reporter—has watched with sadness as newspapers, particularly traditional evening newspapers, whimper and die. We've watched other newspapers, even those considered among the best, experience declines in circulation and readership. We've all been left to ponder the same question: What will the future hold for newspapers and those who create them?

Seeking an answer to that question and other related ones, I spent four months visiting newspapers and asking questions. I talked with the chief executive officers of major newspaper companies, publishers, editors, editorial page editors and others who think about the future.

While most people I talked with express optimism about the future, they admit they operate with a hazy crystal ball. They refuse to paint a clear picture of the industry far into the next century. In fact, they laugh at the idea of predicting the future of the newspaper for the next *decade*. The only prediction that most industry leaders are willing to make is for ever more rapid change.

Jay Harris, publisher of the *San Jose Mercury News*, frames it succinctly: "If I had to have a one-word headline, it would be 'Uncertainty.' And if I had a deck on that, it would be 'The Pace of Change.'"

Mark Willes, CEO of Times Mirror Co., who made headlines of his own while simultaneously serving as publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, a title he has since relinquished, also sees dealing with change as the challenge.

"I think our biggest challenge is: Can we reinvent ourselves quickly enough to stay ahead of the curve?"

"The world is always changing. Competition for people's time is always changing. People's attention span is getting shorter and, therefore, if newspapers are going to stay relevant, they're going to have to always change. ... The people who are going to be successful are those who get to really quite love change rather than resist it—and maybe even the newspaper industry will eventually get there."

The publisher of *The New York Times*, Arthur Sulzberger Jr., says that leaders must not get locked into firm positions that will prevent their seeing change.

"The problem, it seems to me, is to make sure you're not locked into such a strong position that when things change, you can't see the change because you're so committed to it being this or being that. The fight now is not for certainty; the fight now is to become comfortable with uncertainty. And that's why the planning process has become the critical driving element in this company. Not the plan. Not *the plan*. The planning process.

"I don't know what it will be like five years from now. In fact, I don't want to even think about what it's going to be like five years from now."

So how, I ask him, can one plan without thinking about what it will be like five years from now?

"If I'm doing a 10-year plan," he explains, "I have to be committed to changing the plan every single year."

Janis Heaphy, who is publisher of *The Sacramento Bee* after years with the *Los Angeles Times*, has a slightly different take on change. She calls for "moderating our tendency to be fearful about our future, while also continuing to challenge ourselves out of our arrogance."

She sees the industry's arrogance as its greatest issue. "It's about our inability to see that we need to adapt to change, that we have got away with not having to change enough, I think, over the years."

Willes likely would agree. "As a newcomer, I think this industry is the most conservative, most resistant to change industry I have ever seen. It also turns out to be an industry that's preoccupied with itself. The amount of ink that I have gotten when we're just trying to figure out how to do it a little better, it just initially astounded me. It doesn't bother me anymore because there's been so much of it."

## A GROWTH INDUSTRY

While newspaper executives appear to agree that the need to change and the ability to adjust to continuing change are their greatest challenges, other questions that go to the heart of the newspaper's future generate a real debate. Can the newspaper industry, which has experienced readership and circulation declines, become a growth industry? Is it realistic to expect increased circulation? Or can this mature business hope, at best, merely to hold its own or lose readers at a modest rate?

Willes, who had come to Times Mirror from General Mills, quickly learned how controversial the debate could become. After he became publisher of the Los Angeles Times, Willes called for an audacious goal: The newspaper, with a circulation of 1 million, should grow to 1.5 million. The industry was aghast. A year later, more than one industry leader privately suggested to me that Willes' goal was absurd, or even laughable.

But Willes has remained unrepentant, even though the goal remains a distant dream. Would he, knowing what he knows now, have set the same goal?

"You bet. Absolutely," Willes responds without hesitation. He says it goes back to the question: "Do you fundamentally believe in the growth of newspapers?"

He suggests that achieving major results requires quantum leaps in thinking.

"We also did it because it changes in a fundamental way your mental set about are you a dying, declining industry or are you a growth industry. If you say, 'we're going to grow by 50 percent,' you are either absolutely nuts, which some people of course think I am, or you have to say we are in a growth industry. Let's go for it."

Los Angeles Times Editor Michael Parks is equally oriented toward growth, but provides a different perspective.

"I come at circulation a different way entirely. Right now, we are present in 28 percent of the households in Southern California—what circulators call 'penetration.' I call it presence. If we were to increase it by 50 percent, as Mark suggested, that gets us up to 42 percent. My point of view is that we need to be in more than half the households in Southern California."

That means his personal goal would be 1 million new readers, double that sought by Willes. He thinks that's necessary for the newspaper to help readers form "a common basis of understanding" for what the region should aspire to be in the next century.

"To do that, we've got to be in 50 percent, preferably more toward 60 percent, of the households. And we have to be there in a way that we're creating the basis of common understanding. We have to be there in a way that we bring all the information that people need to make decisions and empower themselves."

Willes, by the way, also points out that he did not set a time frame for achieving his circulation goal.

Once the head of the Federal Reserve in Minneapolis, he says, "I learned when I was in the Federal Reserve you



**"The people who are going to be successful are those who get to really quite love change rather than resist it."**

*—Mark Willes,  
CEO, Times Mirror*

can predict the interest rates, but you never give a date and then you're always right."

Meanwhile, among those with a different assessment about newspapers as a growth industry is Tony Ridder, chairman and CEO of Knight Ridder.

When I talked with Ridder, he had just moved his corporation's headquarters from Miami to San Jose, Calif., the heart of the Silicon Valley, where he had been publisher of the *San Jose Mercury News* before he assumed corporate duties. He expects a gradual but inevitable decline in newspaper readership.

"I think, long term, readership is going to decline, but I don't think it's going to be a dramatic shift," he says.

"For the country as a whole, where 58 percent of adults on any given day read a daily newspaper and 68 percent on Sunday, I think particularly that daily number is, over time, going to come down. I think you can stay even on circulation, maybe grow in real numbers, but 10 years from now, we're not going to have 58 percent of the adults reading the daily newspaper.

"I think if the number five years from now is 55 percent or 54 percent, who else has numbers like that? I don't think that means the world's coming to an end. I don't think we ought to just sit here and say it's going to go down so there's really nothing we can do. I think there's a lot we can do to try to maintain and build circulation."



**“We need to be in more than half the households in Southern California...” to help readers “form a common basis of understanding.”**

***Michael Parks,  
Editor,  
Los Angeles Times***

## URGENT QUESTIONS

But even as industry leaders discuss whether there is growth potential in the industry, a hard fact remains. Newspaper circulation during the last decade has been declining or, at best, stagnating. That translates into lagging readership. Daily circulation took a tumble in the early years of the decade, followed more recently by Sunday circulation. "That's at a time when the baby boomers, with

their large numbers, have moved into the years of prime readership. Too many publishers note that as their circulation numbers remain flat, the number of residents living in their area continues to grow. And gnawing questions remain for newspaper industry leaders.

Will younger generations, bred on television and now cutting their teeth on the Internet, follow the trend of their elders and become newspaper readers as they age and settle into families and communities? Or will the generation raised on television and educated by the Internet rely on newer forms of media for news and information?

In fact, more basically, will they become participating citizens—voting, joining civic or political organizations or running for political office? Those questions concern sociologists, but they must be of equal concern to media leaders because those disengaged from their communities and disenchanted with the political process have proven less likely to read newspapers.

Another area of concern is that busy people, especially women, no longer find time to read newspapers.

Dick Wager, publisher of the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, a less-than-50,000-circulation Gannett newspaper in the Hudson River Valley of New York says, "I think we have to find out why busy people aren't buying our newspaper, and somehow *that*, of all things, frightens me most. Busy people, the ones who are active in a zillion things, the ones who work and have their lives sort of plotted out. We have got to figure out how we can be essential to those busy people, and particularly now when you have everybody in families working. Working women are a real part, if you look at the demographics nationally, of that problem."

Why do they not read newspapers more often?

Heaphy in Sacramento speaks of "time deprivation."

"You know that people's lives are so demanding now. There are so many women in the work force—and such a different mix from the traditional household. ... So you're

seeing time deprivation. As a result, I think newspapers suffer in terms of the time that a reader can actually connect with a product."

Willes says, "I come from a world where everybody's thinking about how you market more effectively to women, and I started looking into our data, and we have at the *Los Angeles Times* 500,000 women who read us on Sunday and who don't read us during the week. ... We don't have that disparity for men.

"If we could simply convert our own female Sunday readers to reading during the week, our circulation would grow by 150,000, or 15 percent.

"The research shows that women, on average, tend to be natural readers. They read more magazines than men; they read more books than men. They spend more minutes of the day reading than men. ... You can't say it's just they're too busy. What you are, in fact, saying is that we're just not a high enough priority during the week. ... It's in our control whether we become a higher priority, based on what we put in the newspaper."

## FACING COMPLEX CHALLENGES

Other factors complicate the picture. A highly complex society has brought many new challenges that affect readership and, thus, the industry's future.

When this decade began, most people never had heard of the Internet or the World Wide Web. Now the Internet promises to revolutionize the communications industry as profoundly as did radio and television. And as computers gain widespread use as sources of information, once again come the doomsday predictions for the newspaper.

That view is not generally shared among industry leaders, many of whom point out that such predictions accompanied the advent of radio, then of television. In fact, the advent of each new medium merely brings a

readjustment of the old, not their demise. Radio did not spell the end of newspapers, television destroyed neither, and so far newspapers, radio and broadcast television have survived the proliferation of cable television and the Internet. Meanwhile, movies remain a healthy entertainment form, even if people now can watch movies on television or watch videotapes at home. The allure of the big screen has not been replaced, although stadium-style seating approaching La-Z-Boy comfort and stereo-quality sound has supplanted the old drive-in theater.

That existing media have survived new arrivals does not mean they have done so without struggles. The arrival of the Internet means that leaders of the newspaper industry, along with those of other media, must be smart, innovative and creative about meeting the new challenge. And they must recognize that “they ain’t seen nothin’ yet.”

As Bob Ingle, president of Knight Ridder New Ventures says, “I don’t think we have begun to see all the forms of new media that will exist someday. ... Anybody that says, ‘yup, we can see the whole landscape right now,’ is a fool.”

And Ridder thinks that a decade from now for media executives, “the biggest challenge will be the impact of the Internet on the newspaper and how successful a transition was made to the Internet business.”

Another challenge for the industry is the proliferation of sources of news and opinion, which besides the Internet include talk radio, an expanding number of cable channels with round-the-clock news and analysis and increasing numbers of niche publications. Those new publications, with different standards from traditional newspapers, can damage the credibility of all media. Nowhere have the dangers to the credibility of news media become more apparent than in the 1998 coverage of the presidential scandal involving Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky.



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The Sacramento  
Bee**

Several troublesome trends became apparent in that yearlong frenzy.

Perhaps most obvious and pervasive was the attempt by 24-hour news and talk outlets to find continuing new developments even when there simply was no "news." Touted as the latest on the White House crisis or the most recent sex scandal developments, "news operations" tricked the weary public too often, much as the little boy cried wolf so often that when the wolf came, he was devoured. The excesses of the new media creations soiled more traditional media by association.

But newspapers contributed to their own problems. A series of missteps, including the blown credibility of high-profile columnists and sensational stories that respected newspapers were forced to retract, added to public distrust. And stories initially rejected by mainstream media found their way into general circulation through the back door. In one notable example, House Judiciary Chairman Henry Hyde's decades-past extramarital affair became "news" after Salon, an Internet magazine, broke a story that had been rejected earlier by major newspapers. Such instances become issues of credibility with the public. If newspapers cannot solve this problem, they will forfeit the public trust.

Continuing shifts in demographic trends present another major challenge for newspapers. The industry has not lived up to the stated goal of the American Society of Newspaper Editors for newsrooms to achieve demographic parity with the general population by the turn of the century. After great pressure and much discussion, the organization has set new measurements and goals, even finally agreeing to measure the progress of women in the newsroom, who as a group have not moved forward. Despite the failure and hesitation by the industry, the nation's face continues to change and in the next century the nation's minorities will become the majority. If traditional newspapers are seen as

irrelevant to this increasingly diverse population, their future will be in doubt.

Willes is acutely aware of this trend. "Another area that concerned me enormously was the fact that the fastest growing segment in Southern California is Hispanic and is now 40 percent of our market and our penetration rate in that segment is about 18 percent.

"We have to figure out some way to be more relevant to that market or our future is going to go away. ... Part of the research shows that one of the reasons they don't take the paper is that they don't see themselves in the paper. They look at the front page of any of the sections and they say, 'What does that have to do with me?'"

Furthermore, if warnings about literacy rates and dropout rates, especially among minority youth, are not heeded, the future will be even bleaker for the newspaper industry than for the nation as a whole. Those who cannot read will not become newspaper readers, however enticing the newspaper makes itself.

With so many challenges, how can newspapers continue to compete in a world of exploding media options?



**“The biggest challenge will be the impact of the Internet on the newspaper and how successful a transition was made to the Internet business.”**  
*–Tony Ridder, CEO, Knight Ridder*

# Strategic Advantages

## Play to your strengths

Most people have received this advice at some time during their lives. In a world where expanding and rapidly changing technology brings more competition for people's time, that is good advice for the newspaper industry as well. In spite of their challenges, newspapers enter the 21st century with clear advantages.

- As media fragmentation increases, newspapers may emerge as the sole remaining mass medium.
- Newspapers remain an unmatched source of information offering credibility and context.
- They remain uniquely capable of providing local information.
- Newspapers not only place events and complex issues in perspective, they also offer analysis and opinion.
- Newspapers offer a permanence that other media do not.

"Welcome back to mass medium, right?" Arthur Sulzberger Jr., publisher of *The New York Times*, muses.



"We were that at the turn of the century, and then we stopped being that, and now we're coming back, it seems."

With the growth of cable television, broadcast media are becoming ever more fragmented. Successful magazines appeal to special interests. Internet sites are proliferating daily.

These media trends are leaving newspapers with a major strategic advantage as they once again emerge as the sole remaining mass medium.

That is particularly important to advertisers.

As David Threshie, recently retired publisher of *The Orange County Register*, says, "What everybody is running around and worried about is technology and new media and Internet and all that kind of stuff. I firmly believe that there will always be a solid need for a mass medium, for something that you can get a little bit of everything in."

Keith Spore, publisher of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, sees fragmentation of other media as positive for the long-term future of newspapers. "As television continues to fragment, even though we have declining penetration, we may be in a position to be the last mass-audience provider. I think there's some evidence of that now. People are starting to see that newspapers have held the audience. In comparison, if you want to make TV and radio buys, you have to go to so many different places."

Mike Waller, publisher of *The Baltimore Sun*, sees fragmentation of other media as an advantage for his newspaper. "You can argue that in some cities, Baltimore being one of them, the mass medium is really the newspaper and not the television. If you look at Baltimore and you add up all the viewers of the 6 o'clock news on all three of the commercial channels, we've got more readers than they have viewers *combined* for that newscast. And in fact, the fragmentation of cable has hurt television dramatically, but it hasn't really had an awful lot of impact on newspapers."

If fragmentation of other media leaves newspapers the only mass medium, the implications are clear. Not only can newspapers provide a mass audience for advertisers, they also can be a vital force in the life of the community and of their readers—in a variety of ways.

### THE INFORMATION UTILITY

George Irish, president and general manager of Hearst Newspapers, says, "The newspaper in each of its market places is almost like a utility company. It's the information utility. Rather, I refer to it in terms like the information source. The information source essentially starts with the fact that we are a content company, that we're a very broad content company. No one in the marketplace comes close to gathering and disseminating, storing, archiving information the way a newspaper does. It's a great strength. It comes about through having a lot of feet on the street, having people who have regular contact, in large numbers, with our consumers or readers, with our advertisers, with sources of news in the marketplace. And having done this over a lot of years, in most cases before the turn of the century, we have a very powerful asset and a very powerful brand. ... We need to continually recognize that we're in the information business."

John Schueler, publisher of the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis and St. Paul, sees it similarly. "Nobody has the resources we do on local news and information. Nobody has the breadth and depth or ability to do what I consider that core competence, which is gathering, editing and disseminating useful news and information."

Even with recent problems, newspapers bring to this confused mix a long history of providing fact and opinion in a community, a professional staff of news gatherers and opinion-sharers and a major credible business presence in a



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*Hearst Newspapers*

community. As information sources become more diverse, this becomes an ever more important asset.

Jay Harris, publisher of the *San Jose Mercury News*, has a sense of that asset. "*The Mercury News* is approaching its 150th anniversary in this community. It's actually the oldest business in San Jose; it was founded in 1851. There is a sense among readers about our integrity and our reliability and our stability that you couldn't buy. And it might take you about as long to create it again. And I think that is one of our greatest assets.

It's what Schueler calls "an institutionalized brand identity."

"It has taken decades to develop, and so we enjoy that. We enjoy the equity and association people have with us that they don't accrue with a television station—or magazines that come in and out. So we enjoy something that is generationally instilled in people about what part we occupy in their heart."

Tony Ridder, CEO of Knight Ridder, strongly asserts that his newspapers should focus on local news. "Resources for newspapers are finite, so when you're spending money that way, you're spending less money the other way. It's not glamorous, sexy, to do this comprehensive local stuff. It is to go to the Oklahoma City bombing or maybe even go to Kenya after those bombings [of U.S. embassies]. We actually had people in Africa covering the disaster. Then we can go to the convention and say we were there. I mean, we've got to really change the mindset."



Readers trust newspapers to provide more than facts. They provide credible analysis and opinion. On local levels, they often are the only sources of such credible opinion. Talk radio, perhaps the only other regular source of commentary, is more an open forum than a source of analysis; it's the broadcast equivalent to the Internet.

Harris: "In the last 20 years or so, electronic delivery mediums have surpassed us as the way that people learn about news first. We have gone, therefore, more in the direction of helping people understand it, give people context, synthesize. ... I think that as the pace of life continues to quicken and the speed of information input increases, newspapers will play a role as that product that helps readers pull together and make sense out of what is a very harried world."

And the more complex the issue, the more newspapers shine. Ridder sees the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky story as the kind that newspapers should cover best.

"A newspaper gives you all this depth and all this opinion. If you're really interested in it, you can't understand it by watching television. I think if it's a complex issue or subject, newspapers have a real advantage over electronic."

**“One of the things that’s going to be more important is analysis. We need to more often stop and say, ‘What does this mean?’”**

**–Dick Wager,  
Publisher,  
*Poughkeepsie Journal***

Dick Wager, publisher of the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, thinks this asset will become increasingly important. "I think one of the things that's going to be more important as we get down the road is analysis."

"When you have a running story that goes on and on and on, we need to more often stop and say, 'What does this really mean? And where are we today?' And that's difficult for newspapers to do."

Lee Guittar, recently retired publisher of the *San Francisco Examiner*, sees the trend also. "You watch a vote on TV, and you know it happened, and we report it, and people know it happened. They might have watched it, but they will flock to the newsstands to get the newspaper. ... After you watch something happen, I think it will be up to us to put it in perspective on the significance of it and the background of what went into it and what influence it has."

## TANGIBLE, TACTILE, SERENDIPITOUS

Newspapers are tangible products. Readers can hold them, fold them, carry them, tear them, read them, throw them away, with the assurance that another will arrive on the doorstep the next morning. In fact, few things in life are as faithful as the newspaper.

Harris says, "There is something about the tangibility of a newspaper ... that allows for reflection. It's there to go back to. ... In our sort of hyper speed world now, a newspaper is not nearly as transitory as something that will be on the screen for one second and be gone. And I actually think that in some curious ways that almost provides an anchor."

Bob Ingle, a longtime newspaper editor before he became president of Knight Ridder New Ventures, sums it up: "You can read the paper when you want it, where you want to take it. It's cheap, portable, scannable."

While newspapers offer myriad tangible benefits, the intangibles also matter. For many people, the newspaper is an integral part of the morning ritual, and the role of ritual in life is not to be underestimated.

Ingle again: "There are a whole bunch of things that come into play here that don't get talked about very often. Like the tactile experience. Like how relaxing is it to read news on a computer screen? Not very. I would rather put my feet up, have a cup of coffee and read my newspaper. That's a far preferable way to getting most of the kinds of information that are contained in newspapers."

Reading a newspaper not only is a ritual, but it also can be a serendipitous experience. Think how many miscellaneous items that, together, create a common cultural experience people would miss if they only zoom right to their narrow areas of interest on the Internet rather than peruse a newspaper.

Mark Willes, CEO of Times Mirror, speaks eloquently of such intangibles:

"As you read through or flip through the paper, if we do our job right, you can get attracted to things that you would never bring up on your computer screen, and I think that's important both from the point of view of being able to interest and surprise people and keep them interested in the paper.

"But I think it's also important from a community point of view. If we end up with a bunch of citizens who only read about and are informed about their own narrow set of interests, I worry what happens to us as a society and our lack of understanding about things that we really need to understand if we're to have common cause with each other. If we don't have common cause with each other, we start to splinter apart.

"It's particularly true in a place like Southern California, where you have such rapidly growing minority groups that if they don't understand each other, you start to really

polarize the society. We've done that ... unfortunately, in California. A newspaper, oddly enough, is maybe the only thing that could be a common element of information and, hopefully, understanding in those very diverse communities."

Joseph Barletta, former head of Freedom Newspapers, notes the need for a source of information on a broad range of issues. He speaks of a technology conference he attended recently. "I was surprised and pleased at how many people at my table talked about their need for a newspaper. These are very high-tech people. ... Much was made of 'push' technology, because you can menu-up what you want to be told and it would tell you. ... But a whole school of thought is evolving now that there's a real need for 'pull,' and that a whole lot of things we read are because the editor wanted us to see them. We wouldn't have known to ask for them."

#### 'INFOMATED HOUSEHOLDS'

Andrea Saveri, a director at the Institute for the Future in Palo Alto, Calif., has studied information-gathering habits in what she calls "infomated households," which are households that include at least five of eight new technologies. The eight are VCR, CD, laser disc, fax, answering machine, voice mail, computer and cell phone. She found that those who live in such households also are most likely to be readers of books, newspapers and magazines.

She told me that's because people who have acquired skills in using media to obtain information in this culture are drawn to all media, each for its unique qualities. As technology allows information to become more specialized and tailored to individual taste, customized and anonymous, a strength of newspapers will be their "random serendipity," their novelty and excitement. They are part of a ritual—not a routine—that will not be easily surrendered.



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**–Bob Ingle,  
President,  
Knight Ridder  
New Ventures**

And if George Gilder, who has written much about the new technology, is correct, the future remains positive. He sees the newspaper as the "digital dark horse" of the new information age, arguing that "the computer is the perfect complement to the newspaper."

Gilder, founder of the Gilder Technology Report, writes, "The secret success of the newspaper ... is that it is in practice a personal medium, used very differently by each customer. Newspapers rely on the intelligence of the reader."

Newspaper readers are not couch potatoes, they interact with the product, shaping it to their own ends, he says.

He later completes the circle: "The new technologies ... put individual customers in command."

But his argument goes deeper.

"The ultimate strength of the 'press' comes not from its machinery but from its 'domonetics'—a word that describes an institution's cultural sources and effects.

"Judeo-Christian scripture declares that in the beginning was the word. There is no mention of the image. Today in information technology, the word still widely prevails."

The publisher who perhaps sums it up best is Tim White. Now publisher of the *San Francisco Examiner*, he was publisher of the Albany (*ICY*) *Times Union* when we talked. "Almost all of the new trends are in channels of delivery. And what they have just a voracious appetite for is meaningful content and information. I think we sort of backed up after the initial fright and realized that we're sitting in the catbird seat.

"We are the industry that connects locally. We are, as an institution, really the only people involved in taking emerging current information, putting it in context, giving it meaning and delivering it to a public. So, in many ways if we don't stumble, if we play our cards right, I think that

**"We are the only people taking current information, putting it in a context, giving it meaning and delivering it to the public."**

**—Tim White,  
Publisher,  
San Francisco  
Examiner**

what we've got, and Bill Gates doesn't that capability, precisely.”

# Making Connections

“We are the industry that connects locally.

What we've got, and Bill Gates doesn't, is that capability, precisely.”

Of all advantages that newspapers have over other media, connections to the local community may be both the most important and the most undervalued. Both because of their unique assets and because they lack competition for the role, newspapers can help bridge gaps and connect citizens in ways that no other person or institution can. Those who seize this opportunity, in turn, should reap the rewards of increased readership and deepening loyalty of readers.

Each year the Pulitzer board awards a prize for meritorious public service by a newspaper, indicating that the newspaper's potential as a force for good long has been recognized. In 1998, the *Grand Forks Herald* in North Dakota won the prize for "its sustained and informative coverage, vividly illustrated with photographs, that *helped hold its community together* [italics ours] in the wake of flooding, a blizzard and fire that devastated much of the city, including the newspaper plant itself.”

But, while the newspaper's role of holding its community together receives awards and lip service, in too many communities such efforts occur only during a crisis. Newspapers' leaders usually are so focused on turning out a daily product that they miss opportunities to connect deeply and continuously with their communities,



even though that is one of their clearest advantages. They not only can connect with their readers, but they also have within their power an unrealized potential to help their readers reconnect with the civic life of the community. They can help both set and reflect the community's most deeply held values.

As urban and suburban areas expand, communities will increasingly cut across governmental boundaries, preventing both political leaders and governmental bodies from articulating and solving area and regional problems. Newspapers hold "the power of invitation" to bring diverse people to the table to wrestle with complex issues.

These connections can take many forms—occurring strictly through the news pages or led by the editorial pages, as we will discuss in greater depth later, or coordinated throughout the newspaper.

The concept of community connections, in some of its forms, has become controversial and hotly debated within the industry. The terms "public journalism" and "civic journalism" have been used to describe a wide variety of activities embraced by some newspapers and vehemently rejected by others whose leaders see them as inappropriate for a newspaper whose role should be "objective."

My purpose is not to join that debate. Rather it is to point out that the strategy and philosophy of playing a positive role in the community, in whatever ways a newspaper's leadership finds appropriate, is both suitable and critical to success. My purpose also is to suggest that editorial pages of the newspaper offer the most logical place to provide leadership in this effort. Later, we will look at specific ways that newspapers are attempting to connect with their communities.

## FINDING COMMON GROUND

One person who clearly makes the case for such connections between newspapers and their communities is the Rev. Thomas Shanks, executive director of the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University in California.

Shanks is an expert in ethical decision-making and conducts workshops and leads classes in ethical decision-making. He has studied newspapers and the communication industry closely for years.

"There are very few places in our society where we can come together with different ideologies and perspectives and approaches and actually sit down and begin to arrive at some sense of common ground. In philosophy, the theory of the common good assumes that a community can decide on a set of shared values, and then decide how it's going to accomplish those shared values, reach them, make them real in its community," Shanks says.

"So how do we ever arrive at a set of shared values? How do we ever figure out how to implement them for our communities? A newspaper is, in fact, helping us to arrive at and try to reflect what the shared values are. It tries to create those values in some cases, and I think particularly the opinion pages do that. There are very few opportunities and places where we can do that.

"So the newspaper is in a unique position to pull together people from a variety of viewpoints, get them to the same table and engage in conversation and see what the common places are and where it begins to divide."

Shanks continues, "What I think will happen with newspapers is that the voice of the local community and the common ground for the local community becomes a whole lot clearer as a function for a local newspaper. I think that there is a sense that we have built into us the need to maintain ourselves and survive ourselves and be interested



**"The newspaper is in a unique position to pull together people from a variety of viewpoints, get them to the same table and engage in conversation and see what the common places are."**

*—The Rev. Thomas Shanks, Executive Director, Markkula Center for Applied Ethics*

in ourselves. We also have an instinct to cooperate that helps me and us to advance together—which is where ethics comes from—and the sense that it’s not enough for me just to be concerned about myself.

“I really think as we wind up living more and more in a world of tailored information needs being delivered by computer, there’s going to be more and more of a need for us to figure out how to live together and what’s going to express that to us. I think the newspaper is going to express that a lot. I think knowing what our neighbors are doing and knowing what the common information is that we should know as citizens, there’s a whole role and function that the newspaper will continue to play. I think it’s going to be responding to a basic human instinct.

“Think about what institutions exist currently that can help communities discover shared values, discover the values they want to have as shared values and move it beyond that to asking how are we going to accomplish these values together.”

Shanks thinks that newspapers stand alone in their ability to accomplish this task.

"The only institutions that I can see that have any authority any longer are the courts and newspapers and perhaps the political process, but the political process has no possibility of bringing us beyond partisanship. Law is the lowest possible bar or standard that we can agree upon. Once you get beyond the realm of law, the only voice really, the only common voice that's out there is really the local newspaper. It's not the local television station and the local radio stations.

"Then it becomes the question of how does a newspaper do that. I guess I don't have a sense that newspapers typically see themselves as trying to advance understanding of the values of a particular community or to challenge those values, or to be a voice to help a community identify a set of shared values.”



**“We’re the ones that can really bring the information home that you need to live your lives in a democracy and to participate in the public realm.”**

**–Michael Waller,  
Publisher,  
The Baltimore Sun**

## Lofty Goals

Among the publishers who understand this role and this connection are John Schueler, Jay Harris and Mike Waller.

Schueler, publisher of the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis and St. Paul, says, "One of the things that newspapers will do is knit together the separate communities within the geographic community. And I think that knitting together is an important function that newspapers play.

"I want this community to see the *Star Tribune* as something they cannot live their lives effectively without some attachment to ... that we're very, very important in the usefulness of their lives and that we help people live purposeful lives."

Or as Harris, publisher of the *San Jose Mercury News*, says, "The most important thing to stay focused on is all the good that we are still able to do. We are an institution that makes this community a better place to live."

Waller, publisher of *The Baltimore Sun*, points to the role of the free press in a democracy. "That alone should dictate certain things that make a newspaper different from any other form of media. We're the ones that can really bring the information home that you need to live your lives in a democracy and to live a public life; in other words, participate in the public realm. Newspapers have been dominant about that, and if we're smart, we will remain dominant about that."

The question, then, becomes how newspapers can best fulfill this lofty goal.

## Finding Partners

As newspapers seek better ways to serve their readers, they are beginning to focus on how most effectively to convey the information they have to offer rather than concentrate on the method by which they convey it. They are beginning to break stories by Internet rather than waiting for the next edition of the newspaper. They also are seeking partnerships with broadcast stations or, where possible, purchasing stations themselves. With these efforts, the word "synergy" has entered the media lexicon. The hope is that a multimedia effort will surpass the effort of a single medium.

Tribune Co. in Chicago has taken a lead in pursuing this strategy, but that company is by no means alone. Other industry leaders are seeking ways to take their greatest asset—the ability to gather local news, place it in context, offer analysis and opinion—and distribute it "across platforms," or by different methods.

As John Schueler, publisher of the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis and St. Paul, explains, "One of the things we do is gather and disseminate information. Then, why not be able to refocus that into any platform, whether it is broadcast or Internet or audio text or print or whatever? The gathering and archiving of information, particularly local information, is indeed one of our key core competencies."

Why not partner, he adds, sticking with what the newspaper does best, but partnering with those who can increase its influence?



George Irish, president and general manager of Hearst Newspapers, sees that as important for his company "We clearly do need to create alliances, alliance be able to do many things. It may be alliances of entities that also have content, although in different areas. Then it would mean distribution alliances. We need to take information, whether for a mass audience or only one person, and distribute on any number of platforms.

"Today we have the telephone, we have the pager, have the computer, we have the Internet, we've got CDs we've got radio, we've got television—we've got several platforms for delivery. We simply need to think about ourselves and our content as potentially being delivered on any one of these platforms. It may come through creative alliances with people in the distribution business with people who are today perhaps viewed as competitors, and who may still be our competitors."

Most newspapers have moved aggressively in creating Internet sites, investing heavily in an area where no one, sees when or how the investment will pay off. Why? Because they simply cannot afford *not* to. Talk to people leading newspapers or newspaper companies for more than five minutes, and they'll express concern about losing their classified revenue to the Internet. Their strategy has become capturing the classified franchise on Internet, often through partnerships.

Tim White, publisher of the *San Francisco Examiner* speaks of moving "quickly and aggressively across some very scary turf. All of the emerging platforms, new media in all of its forms, are coming at us at a frightening pace. Realistically, the biggest worry is partly audience fragmentation, to be sure, but the more immediate and pressing concern is economic. Some of our core revenue bases a hugely threatened, classified advertising being foremost among them."

He continues, "It's scary to me how much—several of us have looked back on the past 18 months—how much time we've spent on new-media stuff. And trying to figure out where we're going and how to manage those resources in an arena that is still the tiniest fraction of our total revenue. And that's the scariest part of it, because if we're wrong, we're wasting an awful lot of time."

Tony Ridder, CEO of Knight Ridder, spends his time considering the same challenges. "It's just a hell of a lot more competitive world out there, and we're not quite sure where the Internet's going. The conventional wisdom today is going to change six months from now or a year from now. ...It's really trying to figure out the business model for how we're going to make money. How do we capture all this employment, automotive, real estate business in the electronic world, how do we make money at it, how do we transform ourselves from a print company to print and electronic? The Internet's one way. Maybe there are other things we ought to be doing. Trying to figure all that out, I'd say, is the biggest challenge."

## FORMING ALLIANCES

White sees the largest long-term challenge as retaining audience, "whether we're calling it audience retention or audience building, that is really the bottom line of everything that is going on today, I think. It's having the content in the right form and the right time and place at the right price. It's going to be a huge, huge challenge. It probably will still be an issue of forming the right alliances, because I think going it alone is not going to be an option in the future. We need too many pieces of technology that we're not expert in, that we don't bring any core competence to."

What forms are such partnerships taking? Beyond creating divisions, companies or partnerships involving the Internet, newspapers and media companies are creating many different models and moving at their own speed.

Arthur Sulzburger Jr., publisher of *The New York Times*, speaks of the “24-hour cyber-driven news cycle.”

“We have a wonderful way of doing business today. Once every 24 hours we stop the clock. We take a snapshot, and we present it to our customers, our readers. And it gives us a certain discipline. But it’s not really meeting as many of their needs as we could meet.

“Is there any reason we aren’t serving our readers—and not harming ourselves—by sending out that story when it is ready to go?”

“We’re beginning to do that. And we have an experiment that’s about to start. We are placing one of our cyber folks on our foreign desk, in part to help us become comfortable with this. We’ve done this in little bits and pieces. We did it during the Olympics, for example. We did it during the [1996 political] conventions.”

The *Chicago Tribune* and *The Orlando Sentinel*, both Tribune Co. properties, offer two examples of newspapers surging ahead with synergy, creating multi-media news desks and broadcast studio locations in their newsrooms.

The multimedia desk in Orlando is on a raised oblong platform in the *Sentinel’s* newsroom with computer terminals facing inward, ringing the platform. At those desks sit editors for the newspaper, the newspaper’s graphic’s and photography departments and its online division, as well as a multimedia editor, who keeps in touch with the cable station across the street from the *Sentinel*. (That cable news station is a joint project of Time-Warner and the *Sentinel*.)

A Monday morning news meeting is an informal affair, as those on the platform swing around to face each other, joined by a few other section editors. In fact, during my visit, editor's note that one of the chief benefits from this system is the improved communication that results from their proximity during the day.

When the multimedia editor calls to consult with the cable station's assignment editor, it becomes obvious that he has only the power to persuade and cajole, not the authority to assign a story for use on the station.

*Sentinel* photographers now carry video cameras as well as still cameras with them on assignments.

Reporters often are asked to present their stories in different formats. For example, the city hall reporter may return from a meeting to be interviewed briefly for a cable update and submit a few paragraphs for the online operation before settling in to produce a story for the next day's newspaper.

John Halle, the *Sentinel's* editor, says the next step should be a consolidated electronic assignment sheet that will further increase communication among assignment editors. The newspaper also has been cross-training its news gatherers to be more comfortable working in different media.

This system, obviously, is experimental, attracting attention in this nation, as well as from media owners in Europe and elsewhere. If it is successful, it can position the *Sentinel* as the source of news and information in the area, a formidable advantage for the newspaper and for its readers.

The *Chicago Tribune*, with a much larger newsroom studio platform, may ask a guest visiting for a newspaper interview to be interviewed a second time for television. Reporters or critics can do television segments without great disruption to their workday. From the same floor on the *Tribune* building, information can be prepared for distribution in the newspaper, for online and for the company's cable TV and broadcast stations, including WGN-TV, which Tribune Co. has owned since before newspapers were prevented from owning both media in the same market.



**“Once every 24 hours we stop the clock. We take a snapshot, and we present it to our customers. But it’s not really meeting as many of their needs as we could meet.”**

**–Arthur Sulzberger Jr.,  
Publisher, *The New York Times***

## Finding Synergy

Obviously, when a company owns or controls different media, it is able to leverage talents and resources more easily. Having newspaper, television, radio and Internet blanketing a market (or as with Tribune Co., moving beyond a single market) can create powerful synergy.

But unless laws or court decisions set new precedents, major newspapers will not own major broadcast media unless they have properties that were grandfathered. Cable, of course, offers a whole new world.

Sharing the building housing *The Orange County Register* is the Orange County News Channel, a company that, according to recently retired *Register* Publisher David Threshie, develops 24-hour CNN-style news programming—for Orange County, California. This is provided to local cable operators in the county, and it appears on every cable service. The newspaper initially owned the operation, but no longer does.

"If you have cable in Orange County, you get OCN, Threshie says. "It didn't work very well for us, so we sold it. Although we no longer own it, it's still here in the building, so now we're the landlord.

"We have a closer relationship with it now than we did when we owned it. We share news, we share news sources, we share promotional things. Our reporters and columnists do features for them. It seems to work pretty well."

The most common kind of partnership between print and broadcast media is a promotional partnership, where both partners gain additional exposure. But many publishers and CEOs I talked with are reviewing options and making plans for expanding partnerships.

Sulzberger indicates that *The New York Times* is moving into that area, but he is reluctant to talk specifics. "There are things we are doing today on television that we weren't doing a year ago. There are things that we're going

to be doing a year from now that we're not doing today. That's a whole new area for us to begin to explore. We have the 'Science Times' TV show already up and running. We have special shows—Showtime is our partner—that look at specific issues.

"There are things that we can be doing to extend our brand to reach new readers, to take that wonderful resource we have and just stretch it."

One company without broadcast television holdings is Knight Ridder, which divested those properties to invest in other projects. Is Tony Ridder pleased with that decision?

"No. I wish we hadn't done that."

But he sees it as too late to re-enter broadcasting. "I think now the prices are so high. I think if we had stayed in there and built up the business, we could have been a big TV player, but now for us to do that, I think, would be just more than we could afford."

So Knight Ridder newspapers look at strategic partnerships on a newspaper-by-newspaper basis, mainly for joint promotion, Ridder says.

Times Mirror also is not in the broadcast business. Mark Willes, Times Mirror CEO, points out that the company's television stations were sold before he arrived. But he does not see that as a problem.

"That's a very different business. We don't have institutional expertise in that business. Maybe if we owned them, we would, and I'd feel differently about it, but we sure don't now.

"If you look at the closest point of crossover, which is the news operation of TV, television news is so different from newspaper news that it's hard for me to see much synergy there. I may be wrong. We'll see. I'm glad the Tribune does what it does, Cox does what it does, because I think that's healthy. [Cox Communications Inc. also has cross-media ownership.] "And I think Knight Ridder's

**The most common arrangement between print and broadcast media is a promotional partnership, but many publishers are looking to expand those relationships.**

saying ‘we're going to be exclusively newspapers’ is also very smart.”

He thinks both models can be successful.

But while experimentation with media partners offers promise, and in today's environment appears necessary, it is extremely costly—in time, money and personnel.

Newspaper companies have invested heavily in Internet operations without seeing strong returns—or a clear path to monetary rewards. Likewise, broadcast “synergy” comes with a heavy price tag.

But media partnerships are not the only important alliances for newspapers today. Later, we will examine creative partnerships newspapers are forging with non-media partners, such as colleges and universities, public libraries and other institutions with common interests in contributing to the life of communities.

# The People Challenge

In a world in which coping with change is the greatest challenge facing newspaper leaders, an age-old concern continues constant: people. Finding the best ones. Developing them. Keeping them. Keeping them happy.

Yet, as Philip Meyer, who holds the Knight Chair in journalism at the University of North Carolina, suggested in an article in *USA Today*, journalists have not fared well in the last quarter century. Real wages in journalism are below what they were in 1970. He charges that in times of record profits, and with a surge in good journalism graduates, editors have chosen to hire the cheapest rather than the best. "Entry-level journalists now make less than elementary school teachers do," he wrote.

If that has been happening in good times, what will happen when the outlook is not so bright? At least some industry leaders are aware of looming problems. One person sounding the warning is Arthur Sulzberger Jr., publisher of *The New York Times*. He sees finding and keeping talented people as the greatest challenge of the coming decade.

"It's a huge [problem], and it will be a big one five years from now."

How could that be? Sulzberger cites both a smaller pool to draw from and the increasing job mobility of people.

"Just think about it. The baby boom generation is now 40 to 50, closer to 45 to 60. That's the bulge in the snake. Behind it are fewer people. We now have constructed organizations that demand, how many people? Well, the



baby boom generation. But we know we have fewer people coming down the pipeline, just raw numbers."

Yet, from the smaller pool of talent, *The New York Times* must retain excellence from an increasingly mobile population, he says.

"People are moving more than ever. Three years, 10 years ago, people had three jobs in their career. Today, it's five, and the expectation is by 2005, the average career will have seven different jobs, seven different employers. So there's going to be a lot more looting, a lot more stealing.

"You'll have to be good enough to get the best. They're not going to be coming to you for the same reason their parents did."

If the leader of the Times, without question one of the nation's great newspapers and a dreamed-of destination for many journalists, is worried about finding talent others should be as well.

George Irish, president and general manager of Hearst Newspapers, says he also is concerned. "No longer do people think in terms of careers with a company, or a city, or a newspaper, or television station. That is a challenge, and I think that it's only going to exacerbate the loss of institutional memory and all that implies.

"People will be looking for different kinds of satisfaction in their employment than perhaps they do today. And salary, in some cases we're finding, isn't as important as flexibility in work style—such as being able to share a job. Those are surmountable issues. In fact, I'm not so sure they're problems. They may be opportunities on the flip side of it."

His former colleague, Lee Guittar, recently retired publisher of the *San Francisco Examiner*, says the challenge for his successor in a decade will be "to make sure he's got the kind of talent that can produce these [sophisticated news] analyses. ... People will be the first challenge."

At the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis and St. Paul, publisher John Schueler has a related concern.

"The biggest issue will be employing the right people who will take on more and more personal responsibility for the leadership for the organization, so it is not hierarchical. More and more people must have the ability and have the clear sense of direction so that they can exercise their own leadership, so it is not coming from the top."

But, says Schueler, this involves more than simply empowering people.

"The word 'empowerment' is a cheap word that is thrown around. If people aren't trained and you are giving them empowerment, that is unfair. Or if you've got the wrong person in the job and expect a certain accountability from them and empower them, that is not fair either.

"So there is an awful lot to do with the kind of talent you generate and you develop, and I suspect that you are going to have to develop it on your own. Certainly you are not going to get it out of the schools. The only way you are going to do it is exposing people to tasks and projects to get the kind of experience base they need. I see people and the management of people to be the most critical element that we face."

## AVOIDING BURNOUT

Jay Harris, publisher of the *San Jose Mercury News*, is focusing on keeping his people sharp and preventing them from burning out.

"I think that one of the interesting questions is how long managers and teams can stay fresh and sharp. I have a hunch that will be a challenge. Riding whitewater rapids is a lot of fun, but you would not want to do that at the length of a transatlantic voyage. And I think that running newspaper businesses effectively today is in many ways a far more demanding task than it once was.



**“Running a newspaper effectively today is in many ways a far more demanding task than it once was. A reasonable question to ask is whether people can remain enthusiastic for extended periods.”**

**–Jay Harris,  
Publisher,  
*San Jose Mercury News***

A reasonable question to ask is whether people can remain enthusiastic and open to new ideas for extended periods.”

How is he approaching the task?

“We not only have to give people the opportunity to renew, but we have to insist on it. If you think of this as some sort of battle, if you will, you have to acknowledge the possibility of battle fatigue and insist on R&R before it sets in. He mentioned a number of alternatives:

- "I think that continuing education is very important at all levels of the organization.
- "I think having a business and operating model that is open to testing new approaches with the understanding that many must fail on the way to finding the ones that will work.
- "I think that sabbaticals will be found an important thing. ... If you are devoting all of your time and attention to keeping up with and staying on top of the rush from day to day, you never have the opportunity to think about things in a larger context.
- "I have tried to organize the management staff here, and the way in which I operate as publisher, to give me significant blocks of time to think. We have a [recreation area] out here on the side of the building, which has a quarter-mile track and a lovely tree-wooded area. I spend a fair amount of time walking around there, thinking about the challenges that confront the newspaper. It is not unusual for me to grab employees at various levels and ask them to come walk with me and talk about events."

Most newspaper publishers are not fortunate enough to have a campus-like environment where communing with nature can occur at the workplace, but that does not lessen the need for such reflection and such concern for employee well being.

One "people" issue that deserves more thought by industry executives is effective internal communication.

Many who work for newspapers note the irony that those in communication companies often have so much trouble communicating.

Granted, communication within any large organization is difficult. But newspapers face particular institutional barriers to effective communication. Unlike most companies, newspapers pride themselves on "walls"—walls between news and advertising, walls between news and editorial pages.

The concept of walls has grown from very real, hard rock values. Readers want to be reassured that news judgments are not based on business pressures and relationships. They also want to know that news coverage is not based on the newspaper's editorial opinion, particularly on political matters.

But to avoid either the reality or perception of such entanglements, many employees of the same company choose not to know each other or speak with each other. Rather than determining appropriate relationships within an organization, they choose to have no relationships outside the confines of their own departments. Departmental leaders too often see their counterparts across the "wall" as their competitor, or even as their adversary, rather than their colleague.

"Breaching the wall" was at the heart of the criticism directed at Mark Willes, CEO of Times Mirror. He thinks one reason for the negative reaction is "because some people are afraid."

**"A lot of the coverage comes because of people concerned that we might damage a core value for all newspapers. We're not going to do that."**

*—Mark Willes,  
CEO, Times Mirror*

“There is a very real issue and a very important issue of editorial independence and a lot of things that we’ve been talking about make people fearful that we don’t understand that issue. A lot of the coverage comes because of people concerned that we might damage something that really is a core value for all newspapers. We’re not going to do that. We have no interest in doing that, never have, never will.”

He says he wishes he adopted the language of Tony Marro, editor at *Newsday*, a Times Mirror newspaper. “I started talking about blowing up walls. ... He said we make an important distinction between walls and lines. He said, ‘We don’t have walls, but we do have lines and both sides know on which side of that line they belong, and that’s exactly how it ought to be.’”

## CHALLENGING OLD ASSUMPTIONS

At many newspapers, leaders simply take the old assumptions for granted. I would argue that a changing world demands a reassessment of communication issues within newspapers—not to trample long-standing values, but to find more effective ways of honoring them.

Such a reassessment should include an affirmation to employees that they remain the heart of the enterprise, that on their talent and brains a company ultimately will thrive or fail.

Top management must convey these messages clearly. When I talked with John Schueler in August 1998, he recently had moved from *The Orange County Register* to the *Star Tribune* after its purchase by McClatchy Newspapers, Inc. Consequently, he had been thinking about conveying his philosophy to his new organization.

"Nobody is going to remember three years from now whether or not we made profits this quarter or next quarter. What we will remember are the relationships, how we did our work, no matter how successful or relatively

unsuccessful we were. We will remember how we grew as individuals, what we learned.

"I think it's my bound duty to help infect the organization with this type of thinking. I've gone to 40 meetings so far with 25 employees at a pop, and I'll go through the rest of the company in about two months. That means I'll be up to about 80 meetings. And I share with them my ideas on leadership and tell them what my expectations are. ... It's very exhilarating because I've kind of aligned more who I am with what I do rather than the other way around. I've got a personal mission I developed it six or seven years ago—and what I do helps fulfill that personal mission. And I share that with the people in the company, and I'm very open with communication processes.

"So the journey is as important as the end, probably more so. Because there is no end. And that's why good companies—and good people—will deal with these issues rather than wringing our hands."

He concludes with a philosophy that, if more widely adopted, might lead to fewer ulcers: "Newspapers need to lighten up. Journalists need not to take themselves so seriously that they're constantly under siege. We've made some mistakes; some celebrated mistakes recently. And we need to recognize that the journalistic essence is under attack by the chains that have really squeezed things, probably inappropriately, in order to show earnings growth for Wall Street.

"We need to lighten up a little bit and have some fun with what we do and enjoy what we're doing. We just get too knotted up about things. Some things are what they are. You deal with them.

"I guess the thing is, as hard as we work in newspapering these days, and as much time as we spend on the job, you better find a good quotient of fun. And if you can't do that,



**“Newspapers need to lighten up. Journalists need not take themselves so seriously. We need to have some fun and enjoy what we’re doing.”**

**–John Schueler,  
Publisher,  
Star Tribune**

you may be in the wrong business. So if the culture isn't good and this isn't something that really helps make your day worthwhile, then find something else.”

# Looking to the 21<sup>st</sup> century

As newspapers enter the 21st century, they face great challenges.

Whether they define those challenges clearly, then meet them, will determine the very survival of the industry.

Newspaper leaders interviewed for this project place at the top of their lists finding ways to deal with continuous change. In fact, few industry leaders are willing to make predictions beyond the next decade, other than the need to guide and respond to change. Yet, as the communications world continues changing, newspapers are experiencing high profits and comfortable times. As one publisher noted, the challenge is to pull the industry from its arrogance and complacency bred by the good times.

Clearly providing a warning signal, however, are declining or stagnant circulation figures that sound alarms about the future. Can the industry halt the bleeding and turn around the numbers?

Among related questions: Will young people follow the trend of their elders and become newspaper readers as they age, acquire homes and families and settle into communities? Will busy people, who have too much to do in too little time, continue to make time to read newspapers or will they acquire information from other sources? How can newspapers attract and keep women readers, who read books and magazines at higher rates than men but who read fewer newspapers?



The newspaper industry also faces increasing competition from other media, particularly the Internet. Will the Internet become more attractive for readers seeking more specific information? Will newspapers be able to meet the threat of the Internet to revenue, particularly in classified advertising?

Also facing newspapers as they enter the new century are multiple challenges to their credibility. Some credibility problems are driven by new media, particularly the Internet, as well as by 24-hour cable networks and talk radio. Although they adhere to different standards, these new media too often influence what appears in newspapers. A few high-profile cases where newspaper columnists have erred also have led readers to wonder about industry standards. Those are beside the everyday problems of spelling, grammar and accuracy that newspapers face.

In addition, changing demographics call into question how connected to the real lives of their readers newspapers are and will continue to be.

But along with those challenges come real strategic advantages for newspapers. As other media continue to become more fragmented, newspapers can once again lay claim as the remaining mass medium. Particularly in a local area, the newspaper is likely to reach more people than any other medium.

Newspapers also are unmatched sources of information, if they attend to the credibility challenges they face. They are the most comprehensive source of local information, able to go beyond mere presentation of fact, offering context, analysis and opinion.

A newspaper offers permanence. It is affordable, portable, scannable. It provides a daily ritual, a serendipitous experience, as one encounters the unexpected, the information that draws a community together, focusing people on common experiences.

With these challenges and these strengths, how can newspapers make themselves a vital part of the lives of their readers, ensuring that they survive and thrive in the coming century? One answer lies in moving beyond traditional roles to become better connected to the community helping readers lead more meaningful lives and creating a more lively and democratic civic culture as increasingly diverse people live as neighbors.

If, as has been suggested, the newspaper is the only remaining secular entity that can both reflect a community's values and help consciously shape those values, then newspapers must grapple with whether they will seize this opportunity and how they will fulfill this mission.

As media leaders consider their challenges, they should note two concerns, one new and the other traditional. The new one: How to establish appropriate partnerships within media and outside media with those who share similar concerns and offer limited risks for conflicts of interest.

The traditional one: How to find and keep the best people so that the work will be done well.

The challenge for every media manager is to understand the dynamics and seize the opportunities offered to newspapers today.

The editorial page, indeed the entire opinion section of a newspaper, offers unique opportunities to connect with the community without encountering many of the problems that newsrooms face. The next chapters will focus on the potential of the department that oversees the opinion function of the newspaper to add value, particularly through greater community connections.

## Adding Value

Each weekday morning at newspapers throughout the nation, groups numbering from two to two dozen gather in offices or board rooms to make sense of the day's news, determine opinions and provide context for their readers. These are newspapers' editorial boards. At some papers a position on the editorial board is prestigious and its members are highly valued, with influence out of proportion to the board's size within the organization. At other newspapers they may be undervalued, with one or two people struggling to comment on a wide variety of issues, finding little time for research and too few resources.

Some publishers were aware that the editorial page could make a tremendous difference in the credibility of the newspaper in the community. Others, unfortunately, view it as a source of potential bother, because any time controversial opinions are expressed, people may disagree, sometimes heatedly.

But editorial pages, I would argue, offer the potential to add greatly to a newspaper's value to its readers through strong traditional pages and through many innovative ideas, which will be discussed in the next chapter. As I visited newspapers, I talked not only with publishers, but also with their editorial page editors.

Because I went in search of what works well, visiting newspapers with strong reputations, I found optimistic editorial page staffs who received great satisfaction from their jobs, as well as publishers who have given thought to the role of a strong editorial page. When they discuss editorial pages, they use words like "civility," "values" and "tradition."



In its best traditional role, the editorial page is the both heart and soul of the newspaper and a leader in its community. It not only provides opinion and perspective on national and international issues, but also is most effective in driving change in its locality and state. If connections to the community are vital, the newspaper's editorial pages offer many of the most essential of those connections.

Because the editorial page has no equivalent in broadcast media or Internet, it offers a competitive advantage for newspapers. A few broadcast stations provide editorials, but seldom are the kinds of resources provided for local broadcast opinion as for newspapers. The Internet is awash with opinion of all varieties, but with the exception of opinions that bear a newspaper brand, their factual basis varies greatly. Newspapers are essentially the only secular, nonpartisan, local institutions that say, "This is what we believe," and "This is what we think is best for the community."

Susan Albright, editorial page editor of the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis and 1999 president of the National Conference of Editorial Writers, speaks of making a difference.

"Our voice is important. It means something. We like to lead and want to lead. We don't think it's arrogant. With a very civil tone, we aim to make a difference. I'm really pleased that we make a difference in a positive way. We have time to study the issues. Then we state certain values—whatever the issue. We keep steady—not knee-jerk. We look at issues, then apply values and tradition to them."

To do that, the *Star Tribune* employs 15 people, including six writers and two editors.

Working with one other colleague, Stephen Kiernan, editorial page editor of the *Burlington Free Press* in Vermont, faces a similar task.



**"Our voice is important. We look at issues, then apply values and tradition to them."**  
*—Susan Albright,  
 Editorial Page Editor,  
 Star Tribune.*

The traditional way "is thorough reporting and clear, persuasive writing within the constraints of time and space. The complexity of issues and number of issues has increased that challenge," Kiernan says.

"As society changes, our role will change, but we must maintain a voice of civility and restraint.

"I'm most pleased when the light we shed on an issue causes a public response that changes Vermont for the better."

However, Kiernan undoubtedly speaks for many of his colleagues when he says, "The most sobering and humbling and frightening thing is to be wrong in print."

## ENHANCING VALUE

The fortunate editorial page editors are those with publishers who share their visions. Among such publishers is Arthur Sulzberger Jr. of *The New York Times*. He sees the editorial page as helping create value for readers. "If newspapers are going to survive, they're going to have to enhance their value. Now we've been through a 10-year period where they've been doing the opposite. They've been making less of themselves, not more.

"They are less needed, less interesting, less fulfilling and cost more. If you think of the value of the editorial page, and the op-ed page of a newspaper, I think you can start to see how we can make ourselves more valuable, not less—by not merely laying out for our readers the issues we face but helping to drive to solutions.

"Please do not take this to suggest that we should put editorial voices into the news columns. That is abhorrent to me. But there's nothing abhorrent about clearly defined, strong points of view."

He pointed to the value of strong columnists for the *Times*, mentioning Maureen Dowd and Bill Safire.



**“As society changes, our role will change, but we must maintain a voice of civility and restraint.”**

**–Stephen Kiernan,  
Editorial Page Editor,  
*The Burlington Free Press***

“These are powerful players who are known for their expertise and known for their talent. Our readers are demanding them. Our readers are yearning for this. And we’re not, at newspapers, giving enough of it.”

Strong editorial pages create controversy, he affirmed, and too often publishers shrink from controversy: "Of course, they do. They don't want to be embarrassed in the country club. They don't want to have somebody coming up in the shower room after the game of golf and saying, ‘How could you be saying this about...?’

"And the result is you become less and less vibrant, less and less important.

"I consider [the editorial pages] part of the value we add to our readers, even the readers who don't agree with where we come out. Because on the op-ed page we're going to have a vibrant voice full of opinions, vibrant voices full of opinions that clash with each other.

"On the editorial page itself, in the editorial columns, we ought to have a coherent philosophical standard that we can apply against a variety of issues. And just like a good movie reviewer, you don't always have to agree with where she is, but you need to know if you don't agree with her, you're going to always not agree with her. Our editorial page, I think, gives you a certain standard. I guess you can say, ‘Well, if the *Times* thinks this way, I know I'm always going to feel the other way.’ But they're not going to be wishy-washy, and they're not going to be all over the place. They're going to have a place, they're going to have a coherent stand for something."

## CLARIFYING COMPLEX ISSUES

On the other coast, Mark Willes, who was publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* when we spoke as well as CEO of Times Mirror, also affirmed a key role for the editorial voice of the newspaper.

"I think it's critical. ... It's where you express your point of view on those issues that you think are of fundamental importance to your readers.

"We have this initiative process [in California], which is the dumbest thing I've ever seen. We will watch people walk into a polling booth with our editorial so they know how to vote on that stuff, because it is so complex and so difficult that if we didn't give them guidance—some people also go in and vote the opposite of whatever we say."

But he sees the editorial voice of the newspaper, as distinguished from the whole opinion section, as most important.

"Chat rooms on the Internet are the epitome of part of what we do in an opinion section, which is to share different points of view. ... It's really the editorial function that is our comparative advantage.

"I think the editorial function, as information continues to explode, becomes ever more an important function."

Wines' editorial page editor at the Los Angeles Times is Janet Clayton, who brings a clear vision to her job.

"We help people sift through what's important, help people articulate their concerns, engage people. On commentary and analysis, newspapers do a far better job than broadcast, which can't explain with the same clarity and depth: 'What does it mean?'

"Editorial pages help people to navigate complex policy issues. They hold the ability to affect decisions and set agendas. They serve as an honest broker, not being beholden to political factions. We want to make sure we're reflecting all ideas out there. We want to mix the fun value



**“The challenge is to stay in touch with real people and reflect them in the paper.”**

**–Janet Clayton,  
Editorial Page Editor,  
Los Angeles Times**

and intellectual stimulation. Some pages are too policy-wonkish, not accessible to average people. We want to help navigate in this city of the future where the reader must understand all kinds of people."

She says that as editorial pages seek diversity among their staffs, they must seek "diversity of thought, people who think in different ways. There's not a lot of different thought from anyone in Washington.

"Diversity of thought is the real measure. The challenge is to stay in touch with real concerns of real people and reflect them in the paper."

Another publisher who speaks eloquently about the editorial page's role in the newspaper is Mike Waller, of *The Baltimore Sun*.

"I think [the editorial page] is absolutely vital. I think it is the soul of a newspaper, and I think that this trend that 'we don't need editorial pages and we shouldn't be offending people by what we think' is just utter nonsense.

"In fact, you can tell people what you think, but it does not mean you are right. What you are really trying to do is provoke people in a free society to come up with the solutions to all of the challenges we face. If we are not willing to stand up and have convictions—that is just foreign to me. Why would I want to buy a publication that thinks it needs to be so syrupy, such a disinfectant, that it would offend no one? I mean, I wouldn't want to read a publication like that.

"So I am not a fan of, 'Let's not have much opinion in the paper, and let's not take positions on issues, particularly controversial issues, because it will offend people.' Yeah, it probably does offend people, although you keep hoping that what you are trying to teach is a broadmindedness, and people will make up their own minds about things. But if we don't have the spine to do that, then I am not sure that we should be able to call ourselves a newspaper.

Tim White, former publisher of the *Albany Times Union* who since we talked has become publisher of the *San Francisco Examiner*, sees the editorial page as extremely important for his newspaper, but expressed reservations about its value industry-wide.

"For quite some time, it will be real important here [in Albany], more important than for the industry at large. We're a state capital city. We're also a state capital city without major sports, and politics is our major spectator sport here. It is a contact sport here. We're also an old-world machine politics city. And it is a great kind of environment to be publishing a newspaper in because people care intensely. They read us eagerly, and they react hugely to what our opinions are.

"I don't know about the industry. There's a lot of evidence that our opinion is less and less relevant across the industry. We seem to have less sway over elections.

So that's probably the best measure. We're probably hopelessly locked in to our commitment to good government—goo-goos. And the world may regard that as kind of quaint."

He continued, "Having said that, there are some things we can do," pointing to earlier endorsements for greater impact, for example.



**“We try to set the tone for the general civil life of the community. We are a strong voice, both responsible and innovative.”**  
*–Rob Elder,  
 Editor, San Jose Mercury News*

## BUILDING COMMUNITY

But Dick Wager, publisher of the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, thinks the process rather than the result should be the focus. "I think [the editorial page is] enormously important . . . and I don't mean that it's enormously important in terms of swaying opinion either, because I play down that part of it. I don't worry or keep score on whether the candidates we endorse or the issues we endorse actually are approved by the voters. I really don't think that's the important part. I think the point of an editorial page is to bring people's attention to subjects that need to be dealt with and here's our opinion, after our research, of what might be done or should be done with this issue. And I think that really stirs the pot and helps make a newspaper what it really should be, and that's a catalyst for change."

Rob Elder, who supervises the editorial pages of the *San Jose Mercury News*, faces particular challenges in the sprawling Silicon Valley. For his newspaper, he says, local has a wider and wider meaning. As high-technology industries have brought more and more people to the Bay area, the newspaper finds itself trying to serve an audience that increasingly leaps over political boundaries to create a super-region.

"No governmental or planning agency can deal with problems such as housing or traffic congestion," he says.

"Political jurisdictions no longer fit reality."



In that kind of setting, he sees “community-building” as a major function of the newspaper’s editorial pages.

When he saw the pages attracting older and older audiences, with fewer younger readers and fewer female readers, he abandoned the pages’ traditional design a few years ago to seek a broader audience.

Editorials now vary in length, number and placement on the page. Editors seek out views contrary to the paper’s position and attempt to run them in conjunction with the paper’s institutional view. There is a greater emphasis on graphics and the pages’ appearance.

Elder says although traditional readers were initially upset, after six months the pages appeared to be drawing a more diverse readership.

“We try to set the tone for the general civil life of the community,” Elder says. “We have a big impact on local politics.

“We’re not a fringe gadfly; we are a strong voice, both responsible and innovative.”

But as people define the value of the editorial page, no one put it more succinctly than Janis Heaphy, publisher of the *Sacramento Bee*, who came from an advertising background: “I think the editorial actually is a wonderful thing inside a newspaper that you don’t find really anywhere else. ... To me, it’s like a pearl of our whole enterprise.”

## Drawing a Powerful Constituency: An Interview with Howell Raines

Howell Raines, editorial page editor for *The New York Times*, moved to directing the editorial policy of the newspaper after a career in news. He expressed surprise at learning how many people go first to the editorials when they pick up their newspaper.

"I've been really amazed at what a powerful constituency, within the broad family of newspaper readers" is there, he says. His challenge, he explained, is, "How do you serve the intellectual needs of that broad, national constituency when it comes to opinion writing?"

His answers to that question provide helpful thinking for editorial pages seeking to better serve their community or region.

"We want to make the *Times* editorials less painful to read. I'm a big enemy of eat-your-peas editorial writing, which says there's a wholesome meal but it's not going to taste so good. I think it can be fun to read and still have the intellectual content.

"The other thing I think we really have to do is increase the diversity of what you encounter in the editorial column. ... I'm starting to increase the number of cultural editorials because culture is the industry of York City. Culture is to New York City what steel used to be to Pittsburgh. By culture, I mean everything from Mickey Mouse to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, encompassing publishing, movies, everything. Now we have a writer who covers that world.

"We have a writer who writes about Wall Street and the corporate world, as well as macroeconomics in the federal budget. There, again, I want our reader in the financial industry in New York City to be as drawn to our editorial page as to *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page. There are a lot of days that you look at our editorial page now and you'll find more sophisticated business editorial in our page than you'll see in *Journal's* page, and that makes me feel good.



**"I'm a big enemy of eat-your-peas editorial writing. I think it can be fun to read and still have the intellectual content."**

**—Howell Raines,  
Editorial Page Editor,  
*The New York Times***

"We're doing a lot more environment. We're doing a lot more sports as part of the American scene. I think editorial pages everywhere have got to broaden the menu of what we have opinions about away from the statehouse, the courthouse, the Congress."

He also says editorial page editors and writers should pay more attention to readers who rely on the editorial page, rather than the whole newspaper, for their window on the day's events. In Raines' words, this is "the reader who uses the editorial page as kind of a cram course for that day, so they have something to talk about at the dinner party that night, or who reads the editorial page knowing that they're not going to have time to read the entire news content, or they're not going to see the evening news on television, but they want to dodge through the doorway of opinion of what's happening in the world."

Raines has expanded the diversity of people who are editorial writers for the *Times*, which, he says, has brought a richness to the process of determining opinion.

"I found that people's opinions aren't quite as predictable as one might expect. I'll always believe that the more minds you have flowing into the decision the better decision you're going to get. As the corollary, the more diverse kinds of minds you have as to background, education and experience, the richer kind of decision you're going to get. I've watched the impact on this board as it moves from mainly white mainly male, mainly middle-aged, in the direction of more diversity as to color, more diversity as to gender and more diversity as to age. I certainly see a difference in the process, the discussions that we have, a think I see a difference in the content, too.

"One thing I also believe very strongly, and this gets highly theoretical, but it's probably been the single biggest principle that I've had since I've been here. There was a time in journalism in general and certainly on this paper when you could get hired and advanced if you had a good body of knowledge of foreign affairs economics, politics and workmanlike prose. The reality of it is that that's now a false dichotomy. There used be a time, perhaps,

that if you found somebody with a body of expertise, you went for that because you couldn't find somebody with the expertise and the literary skill as well.

“Nowadays, you can find fine writers who also have the intellectual capabilities. That's a roundabout way of saying I try never to hire anyone who doesn't have above-average writing skills. That's really changed what I call the orchestral sound of our page. I don't want everybody to write like me, but I do want everybody to bring some stylistic distinction to the page. I think one of the most essential things for any editorial page to do is to really think hard about the reading experience. There's no way to write about nuclear arms control and make it 'fun' to read, but you can make it intellectually pleasurable to read. I think that's important, and probably the biggest change on this board is hiring consciously for people with a highly developed literary skill.”

What about a concern that there's a disconnect between editorial pages and people?

“I'm not as alarmed about that as most people in the industry, I suppose. ... I think, over time, our national experience has been that the American people focus on matters of great moment at the appropriate time and other times they don't seem to be paying any attention or they've got other things on their minds. One of those things may be being angry at the government, which I would argue as a kind of engagement. What I'm trying to suggest is, I think it's our job to pay attention to those things that are not No. 1 or even No. 10 on the public priority list right now, because they'll come back around to picking up those issues.

“I don't worry too much about being the facilitator of a relationship. I worry about being the deliverer of the content that's necessary for a conversation between the public and the government when the public says it's ready. That's highly theoretical, but it's a political science question and that's my political science answer.

“I’m not as pessimistic about the state of public attention to public affairs as it’s fashionable to be. Covering some of these political campaigns, I was always impressed when I would go any place in the country at the level of public interest in the presidential campaigns when it’s appropriate. This is still a country where people get up in the middle of the night in Iowa to go out to these caucuses and all the other examples you could cite.”

But why the disconnect between the harsh judgment of the newspaper editorial pages of president Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky affair compared with the more forgiving tone of the public as reflected by the polls?

“The short, and I hope not flippant, answer is because it’s our job to be wherever our skills and knowledge and professional experience take us. I don’t think we should do that according to polls. If you’re nervous about not being where 60 percent of the American people are at any given moment, then there are good jobs for you, but opinion journalism is not one of them.

“The editorial writer’s job is essentially that of liberal arts scholarship. You load in as much information as you can lay your hands on and then you recapitulate it in a newly created form that adds something. That’s the part of it I like. The part of it that I worry about is communicating more clearly to the reader that in giving you this opinion we’re not trying to convert you. We’re trying to provoke you to take what is useful for you or to reject whatever you don’t agree with, and in the process arrive at your own opinion. This is not evangelism, this is an intellectual exchange.”

## Models for Connecting

Minnesota in August can be hot, a surprise to a first-time visitor from Texas. When people attending the highly popular Minnesota State Fair in Minneapolis gathered under the trees before an outdoor stage to hear their gubernatorial candidates debate in August 1998, all but the candidates were dressed for maximum comfort. The debate, co-sponsored by the *Star Tribune* and Minnesota Public Radio, offered a fascinating field of candidates, featuring such notables as the sons of Hubert Humphrey, Walter Mondale and Orville Freeman, as well as the grandson of the founder of Dayton Hudson department stores. But the one candidate who did appear cool and comfortable that day sported a muscle shirt and a bald head. And when Reform Party candidate and former wrestler Jesse “The Body” Ventura spoke, his crowd went wild. Moderating the debate was Lori Sturdevant, an editorial writer and columnist for the *Star Tribune*, who has long observed Minnesota politics. Later that day, Sturdevant said she thought the press was underestimating the appeal of Ventura, an observation that proved an understatement when Ventura was elected governor in November. Noteworthy about the debate were average citizens seated in the front rows who rose to ask thoughtful questions on wide-ranging issues affecting Minnesota. The gubernatorial debate was only one event in an elaborate effort by the *Star Tribune* and its partners to help the people of Minnesota become more engaged in the political process that election year. Because the state fair is such a big event for Minnesotans, it was the perfect spot for the media partners to draw people into the political process within a few months of the November election.



Those enjoying the fair also could step up to a video camera at the *Star Tribune* display and tape a question to a gubernatorial candidate. The question, and an answer, later would be played on radio and television by one of the *Star Tribune's* media partners. On another day, fair-goers would be able to conduct a job interview with a candidate at the *Star Tribune* area as well

The overall project, of which the gubernatorial debate and other activities at the state fair were a part, was a statewide effort called the Minnesota Citizens' Forum. Besides the *Star Tribune* and Minnesota Public Radio, partners were KTCA-TV and the Minnesota Journalism Center. Media groups throughout the state became involved, including the Rochester *Post-Bulletin*, the Mankato *Free Press*, Murphy McGinnis Media, Insight News and KMOJ Radio.

A February 1998 *Star Tribune* KMSP-TV Minnesota Poll identified five key issues on which to focus during the upcoming election season. At the same time, pollsters asked people if they would be willing to participate in a citizens' forum, and the forum was formed from people who responded positively.

The five issues were education, public funding of professional sports, taxes, crime and poverty/welfare

After the poll identified key issues, citizens learned about them in a series of monthly forums and drew up questions to be asked at a July 1 primary debate, the state fair debate and another live televised debate in October. In addition, after forums on each topic, people were invited to call in questions to a Minnesota Public Radio program.

Through teleconferencing, groups in Rochester, Duluth, Mankato and Crookston participated, along with the people selected in Minneapolis and St. Paul. From this group came the debate questioners, reflecting the concerns of people from communities throughout the state.

One of the success stories is the involvement at Lucille's Kitchen. Concerned that participation among African-Americans was low and finding that conversations were occurring in locations where many blacks did not feel comfortable, Larry Werner, reader involvement editor for the *Star Tribune*, found Lucille's Kitchen, a soul food restaurant that was a center of life in the African-American community. He brought people together for discussions at Lucille's, and then linked them by teleconferencing to wider discussions. Members of that community discovered they had much in common in terms of economic problems with farmers in the western parts of the state. Those discussions at Lucille's since have evolved into other issues beyond the election project.

Sturdevant, who participated throughout the project and was visible as a host and moderator, says it allowed her to get to know people and take back to the editorial page what she learned from them.

"My role was to hear the concerns from citizens and to be informed by them, but not to let them think they would determine the newspaper's editorial policy," she says.

While the newspaper endorsed Humphrey, citizens on the forum held their own distinct views, as was obvious in an editorial in the *Star Tribune* on Nov. 4, 1998, the day after Ventura was elected governor:

"To a citizenry frustrated for whatever reason with politics, Ventura looked refreshingly different. His backers among the participants in the Minnesota Citizens' Forum, sponsored by the *Star Tribune* and its media partners, spoke last week of weariness with politicians that they believe put self-interest ahead of public interest. They criticized political parties that subject voters to shrill, divisive rhetoric while clinging to what appears to voters to be a fundamental sameness. They praised Ventura for what they saw as his boldness and honesty, saying those traits made him different from standard-issue politicians."



**“My role was to hear the concerns from citizens, but not let them think they would determine the newspaper’s editorial policy.”**

**–Lori Sturdevant,  
Editorial Writer,  
*Star Tribune***

The Minnesota Citizens' Forum is only one project for Werner, who directs the newspaper's efforts to engage the community. He reports to the editor, but other segments of the newspaper, including the editorial page, become involved in the effort. In fact, he sees it as a strategic advantage that the news and editorial page departments are willing to cooperate in these initiatives.

Susan Albright, editorial page editor, notes that this is one of the few areas where news and editorial can "hold hands across the walls," working together on joint projects. Two other examples of ways that Werner has found to interact more directly with the community:

- **Listening sessions.** Once a month, a group of newspaper leaders goes into a particular community to listen to its leaders. Werner consults with reporters to make sure he's inviting a good community representation, including the area school superintendent, the chief of police, volunteers, environmental activists, civic leaders, a variety of people, to talk about what is happening in the schools and the community. Those from the newspaper listen, learn and make community connections. "The conversation is lively and we are building a database of contacts," Werner says. "It gets us out of our world—it gets us out and gets them in."
- **Newsmaker round tables.** Once a month, the newspaper invites leaders of an area business or community organization for lunch at the newspaper's conference center with the newspaper's leadership. This may include the chief executive officer and other officers of a major business or industry, a teachers' group or

a group from a minority community. The maximum number attending is 25.

The challenge, according to Werner, is to translate these efforts at community interaction into the newspaper. "The struggle is: How does this translate into print? This is about building connections to people who haven't been connected. We haven't figured out how to really exploit these connections."

On the editorial pages, one answer is through increased insight brought through editorials, as the editorial on Ventura illustrates. Another place is through a column that Sturdevant writes, in which she is able to reflect what she has learned through more community connections.

The extensive efforts of the *Star Tribune* to connect with the community, which the paper funds itself rather than through grants from other organizations, offer only one model for such connections. While a few newspapers have elaborate programs requiring significant expenditures of time and resources, others work in a variety of more modest ways to draw readers into a closer relationship with the newspaper.

What follows are descriptions of a variety of techniques that newspapers, usually through their editorial pages, have tried. This is by no means a complete listing. Many other newspapers undoubtedly are involved in similar or entirely different creative efforts. Some are comfortable with calling their projects public or civic journalism; others are not and would argue that their efforts are merely pushing to better fulfill the traditional role of the editorial page.

## Connecting With Letter Writers

Among a newspaper's most faithful readers are its letter writers. They take time to engage an issue and respond, often to what is discussed within the pages of the newspaper. A number of newspapers have created ways to recognize outstanding letter writers and to reward them for their loyalty. This usually includes some method for noting outstanding letters when they run, then recognizing the writers at an event sometime during the year.

The *Chicago Tribune*, for example, calls its program fox Populi, or Voice of the People. Don Wycliff, editorial page editor, says his department keeps tabs on all letter writers and invites the most faithful to an annual dinner the first week of May at the Hotel Inter-Continental Chicago, across the street from the newspaper. The event, which has become highly popular, includes local personalities, time for letter writers to have two minutes at the microphone and a tour of the newspaper for those who wish. About 200 people attend.

Wycliff credits another Tribune Co. newspaper, *The Orlando Sentinel*, with the idea. *The Sentinel* awards stars to writers with particularly good letters. Editorial page editor Manning Pynn says brevity and humor are two prized qualities. An annual event honors all writers who have received stars that year. At the dinner, they are awarded certificates.

*The Journal Gazette* in Fort Wayne, Ind., honors a letter writer of the month by running his or her picture and biography on the first Sunday of each month. These Golden Pen award winners are invited to a banquet each February, where one is selected as the Golden Pen award winner for the year. The monthly winners receive a golden pen, and the year's winner gets a more elaborate desk set. The newspaper also names a citizen of the year, who is also honored at that event.



**“The conversation is lively. It gets us out of our world— it gets us out and gets them in.”**

**—Larry Werner,  
Reader Involvement  
Editor, Star Tribune**

*The San Jose Mercury News* recognizes Silver Pin award winners with a smaller but elaborate dinner at which they are given silver pins from Tiffany. The winning letter writers' letters appear in the paper with a silver pin logo, designating them as having been a winner sometime during the year.

Some newspapers make this a community event, inviting political leaders or community personalities to meet with the writers. Another variation is a reception for all writers, rather than a more exclusive event for select ones.

The key, of course, is to find what will work best in a particular community, depending on its size, as well as social, cultural and political climate. Each of these events has similar purposes. They reward outstanding letter writers and connect them to the newspaper and its leaders annually.

## Community Forums And Town Meetings

Many newspapers have been experimenting with community forums or town meetings. Sometimes they are precipitated by a local crisis, such as the departure of a major employer that could potentially throw the area's economy into a tailspin. Other symposia deal with more deep-rooted community problems, such as crime and its prevention. Still others deal with societal or foreign policy problems. Elections also provide the opportunity for newspapers to draw citizen attention to the political process through debates or other community events.

Here are a few examples of events at which newspapers can exert what has been called their "power of invitation" to convene a community to devise a strategy or solve a problem.

When General Motors announced a plant closing in Delaware in 1992, *The News Journal* in Wilmington called editorially for the governor to involve citizens in discussions on how to respond. But not waiting, the newspaper decided to organize an economic summit, John Taylor, editorial page editor, says. Because the state is so small and the newspaper a major force in the state, it was able to organize town hall meetings at which minutes were taken in five different parts of the state. Then the newspaper invited readers to send in suggestions, many of which it printed. This led to the summit itself, where 27 people were selected to discuss the ramifications for two days. Between 200 and 300 people attended at least part of the summit. The newspaper published everything resulting from the summit, then came back several months later and printed a report card on the five to seven major things that had been accomplished.

In 1994, the newspaper followed with a symposium on infant mortality and teen pregnancy, partnering with social service agencies dealing with those problems. A lunch drew 500, and 500 to 600 people attended the symposium.

In 1997, the topic was land-use planning. Four statewide meetings resulted in 10 recommendations for the Delaware legislature that changed the state's whole approach to land use and planning, Taylor says.

A 1998 symposium looked at education reform, what works and what does not work. Taylor says these symposia result in lead pieces for the Sunday opinion section or whole Sunday sections.

Partners have included the University of Delaware and the Public Policy Institute.

Evan Davis, editorial writer at *The Journal Gazette* in Fort Wayne, says his newspaper, flying in the face of conventional wisdom that people are not interested in foreign affairs, was involved in two successful symposia on foreign affairs issues. The first, planned before but

occurring during the Gulf War, was themed "America's Role in the New World Order." The effort, with a different title, was duplicated the next year.

*The Star Tribune* and *San Jose Mercury News* have tried a different approach. They have taped their symposia, then I transcribed the tapes and printed edited transcripts in their opinion sections. While the editors express satisfaction with the results, Albright in Minneapolis says the process is extremely time consuming.

### Community Advisory Boards

Newspaper editorial boards have struggled the last several years with the same problem that has faced newsrooms: how to reflect an increasingly diverse community with a staff that traditionally has been composed of older white males. The best solution, of course, is to move toward a more diverse staff—in gender, ethnicity, age and geographic location of residence within the community. But a more immediate solution for some has been through a community advisory board, often chosen to bring editors and writers in contact with people who traditionally may not have had access to the newspaper.

Such boards vary in size, length of service and frequency of meetings, duties and manner of selection. Some newspapers advertise for board members and select from those who apply. Others simply invite people they want to get to know. Some editorial boards invite their advisers to help interview political candidates or discuss issues. Some meet weekly, others monthly. Some hold luncheon meetings; others meet in the late afternoon. Some always meet at the newspaper; others go into the community. Boards may include from four members to more than a dozen.



**Don Wycliff, *Chicago Tribune* editorial page editor, invites the paper's most faithful letter writers to a highly popular annual dinner.**

From such advisory groups, reporters and editors develop new sources; people from communities with little connection to the newspaper learn how it operates and whom to call. They also discuss both criticisms and story ideas, and many develop continuing relationships with the newspaper. Seldom do such boards have strong input into actual development of editorial policy, however.

The *Orlando Sentinel* has an interesting variation of the process. The editorial page editor establishes a critique committee, whose members are invited for an orientation luncheon and tour. They then meet on their own, critique the newspaper and submit a written report. They are given access to people at the paper during their term of service.

"This lets people know we are an open institution," says Manning Pynn, editorial page editor at the *Sentinel*

**The *Journal Gazette*, flying in the face of conventional wisdom, sponsored two successful symposia on foreign affairs issues.**

## Setting Agendas

The *Sentinel* also is one of a number of newspapers that establishes an agenda for the community each year. It is published each January. Although some papers create an agenda focusing on as many as a dozen issues each year, for 1998 the *Sentinel* chose four: developing new leaders; connecting schools and the workplace; working on a better transportation system; and finding common ground and valuing differences. The agenda determines where major editorial efforts will be focused for the year and includes logos designating agenda issues.

The *Sentinel* also uses the agenda section to include guest views on the agenda items, explain the various features of the opinion pages and introduce the staff of the opinion section and leaders of the newsroom.

My own experience in working with community agendas at the *San Antonio Light* for four years was that more impact came from focusing on a limited number of issues. Our most successful effort was a 1992 agenda that focused strictly on children's issues. That covered their education, health care, day care, juvenile crime problems and related issues. But an agenda became an effective way to focus both the community and the editorial page on critical issues and push for specific change in those areas.

## Creating Partnerships

Those on editorial pages can find a variety of opportunities to create partnerships, both with other media and with non-media partners, such as colleges and universities or libraries. One example is provided by a partnership between the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and St. Paul's public library system that helped many hundreds of people become more aware of poverty issues. (For details, see the "Power of One Idea" sidebar at the end of this chapter.)

The *San Jose Mercury News* partnered with the county library system to create open community forums in an effort called the Common Ground Project. The forums relied on a Kettering Foundation method of providing background information and stimulating public discussion on major issues in hopes of finding common ground.

Editor Rob Elder, who directs the *Mercury News* editorial pages, and library director Susan Fuller point to a series of conversations on affirmative action held in libraries throughout the county as their most successful effort. It occurred before the vote on California's statewide referendum on the issue.

Fuller says that libraries and newspapers share many of the same goals. "Both are in the information business. Both are strong supporters of the First Amendment and open access to information."

In addition, both have major stakes in the literacy of the population.

The editorial pages of the *Mercury News* have been instrumental in bringing issues to the forefront when the libraries faced major funding cuts and when filtering Internet sites for children became a hot issue in the community.

Fuller and Elder say the community conversations are highly labor intensive and a topic must be tied to a carefully defined issue for such discussions to prove successful. But Fuller thinks the work the two have done together will result in continuing partnerships as the need arises.

A number of newspapers that sponsor conferences or community forums choose to partner with an area university. A university can provide academic expertise and facilities for community gatherings. One example, described earlier, is *The News Journal* in Wilmington, which partnered with the University of Delaware on forums.

A number of newspapers have found media partners on specific projects. More traditionally, members of editorial page staffs have appeared on public affairs programs, often broadcast on public television or radio stations. Some have partnered with commercial broadcasting stations or cable enterprises as well, as I've described elsewhere.

In Madison, Ws., the *Wisconsin State Journal* and WISC-TV, the ABC affiliate that is the market's top-rated station, have worked together on a number of projects, including a continuing Wisconsin voter project funded by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, called "We the People." In addition, Neil Heinen, editorial director for WISC-TV, and staff members of the newspaper also have collaborated on local projects. This collaboration is made possible because Heinen's station is one of few nationally with a full-time person devoted to editorials and public affairs programming. When collaborating on projects, Heinen's Sunday public affairs forum will cover the same topic as the Sunday newspaper. The program will refer viewers to the newspaper coverage, and the newspaper, in turn, will refer readers to the television station's efforts. This is just part of the sophisticated and well-developed projects in that community.



**Meg Downey, editorial page editor of the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, asks members of her community advisory board to write during the time they serve.**

### **Inviting Community Writers**

In another effort to broaden the appeal of the opinion pages, a number of newspapers have employed various ways to attract guest columnists from the community. *The Sacramento Bee* has a rotating panel of columnists (six columnists for six months) and seeks to extend the range of subject areas to include sports, the Internet and popular culture. *The Orange County Register* has what editorial page editor Cathy Taylor calls an "extended commentary family of 50 to 75 regular writers."

Meg Downey, editorial page editor of the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, asks members of her community advisory board to write during the time they serve. *The Burlington Free Press* has a weekly feature called "Monday Morning" in which people are invited to write about what has happened to them in a way more informal than what is usually found on the opinion pages. In addition, the newspaper has four

guest columnists who write for six months, then four new writers are asked to take their place.

All these techniques—special events to recognize letter writers, community forums and town halls, community advisory boards, agendas, partnerships and rotating community columnists—are attempts by newspapers, particularly the editorial pages, to fulfill the critical role of better connecting with their communities.

## What About Small Newspapers?

What happens when a small newspaper has an editorial page operation with only a couple of people who must fill essentially the same amount of space as those newspapers that boast an editorial board of a dozen or more? Meg Downey and Stephen Kiernan offer proof that a small shop can demonstrate the same kind of creativity as their better-staffed counterparts, although it takes energy, innovative thinking and commitment. Downey is editorial page editor of the *Poughkeepsie Journal* in the Hudson River Valley, a 90-minute train ride north of New York City. Kiernan edits the editorial pages of *The Burlington Free Press* in Vermont. Each does so with a staff that includes only one other editorial writer.

### Poughkeepsie

The editorial page of the *Poughkeepsie Journal* does not need a mission statement. Its mission is apparent to anyone who reads it: to convey a love (there's simply no other word) for the region and a desire to see it grow with grace. To accomplish that mission, the newspaper employs every weapon in its arsenal. Among the features of the Journal that appear to contribute to its success:

- Publisher Dick Wager, Executive Editor Derek Osenenko and Downey have long tenure with the newspaper and in the community. A visit to the newspaper on an October day confirmed for me two facts: They are here because they want to be, and the Hudson River Valley, with its rich history, culture and natural beauty, is a place worthy of such loyalty.
- The news and editorial sections communicate well, cooperating on major projects. As Osenenko says, "We are a project-driven, public-journalism paper that needs a strong editorial arm. A lot of planning includes the editorial page."

- The newspaper attempts to involve the community through advisory boards. One is a reader advisory board that includes four people and rotates yearly. Downey solicits applications and from several dozen readers who apply selects a cross-section of people who meet once a month, are invited to all editorial board meetings and are encouraged to write columns. In addition, a larger multicultural affairs committee is chosen to reflect the diversity of races, religions and ages among readers. This group offers feedback on coverage, ideas and suggestions for sources.
- In addition, the newspaper uses focus groups, surveys and community forums to involve the community in important issues. What is impressive about the newspaper is the sheer number of innovative projects that have occurred here over the last decade dealing with the growth and future of the community. They have included special projects by the newsroom combined with thoughtful editorial packages; continuing editorial page crusades extending over months and years; community forums that are preceded by the newspaper seeking and publishing reader input, and special sections. Topics have included housing, saving the waterfront, developing a vision for downtown, cleaning up the Hudson River and focusing on sound regional planning.



The newspaper has brought together special reports called the "Learning Curve" that focus on the performance of local schools.

Downey is not afraid to throw out the traditional design of an editorial page to bring attention to an issue. Some editorials take

a full page, with graphic illustrations, fact boxes and information for readers on how to get involved.

Two continuing concerns are apparent:

- The economic development of the area since the 1993 downsizing by IBM, as Poughkeepsie has moved from a company town to a more diversified economy and an area that attracts commuters from New York City.
- The relationship of the area to the Hudson River on whose banks it sits. For example, one continuing editorial series is called "Greenway Visions," a campaign to create a Hudson River Valley greenway through the counties along the river's banks.

Both issues have led to continuing projects that provide the community with an opportunity to create its future.

### **Burlington**

Depth and creativity mark the approach of the editorial staff of *The Burlington Free Press*. Each year the two-person staff undertakes from two to four major enterprise projects that outshine those of many staffs much beyond their size. They also seek ways to involve readers in their efforts. Here are examples:

- When what Kiernan described as a horrendous ice storm killed many of the city's trees, the editorial page initiated a campaign to replace them called "Trees for the 21st Century." The page named the 1,600 contributors. Kiernan made television and radio appearances. With federal dollars leveraging community contributions, more than half a million dollars went to replant trees. The community received 10,000 saplings, which were given to residents to plant. The last 1,000 saplings were

distributed at a tree festival, which celebrated the success of the entire project.

- The editorial page had a balancing-the-budget exercise. After publishing information on the federal budget, the newspaper provided coupons asking people to send in ideas for balancing the budget. Four hundred people responded. The editorial page published the views of the newspaper, responses from three local members of Congress and a wide variety of reader reactions" with the newspaper's analysis of those reactions. In a similar exercise with the state budget, which drew 250 responses, the newspaper endorsed major items the public wanted, and the state paid attention.
- For five years the editorial page has sponsored a cartoon contest, recently drawing 354 entries, including submissions for a separate children's category. Entries are judged by the editorial page staff, and the best cartoons are run in the newspaper's Sunday Perspective section.



Kiernan attributes strong reader participation to the human scale of the state and the sense of ownership that people in Vermont feel. He says the newspaper receives a large number of letters, creating an unusually active Readers Forum. As he expresses it, "Readers own the page, and they put it to use."

Kiernan makes a special effort on the page, he says" to empower the readers. When an editorial urges action, it tells readers whom to call and how to reach them. For example, on

one issue, he included photos of senators and the legislative finance committee with their phone numbers.

The key to success in keeping reader interest is to pick the right issues, he says. "We say, here's something that's a big deal, then invite readers to comment."

## The Power of One Idea

Broadening community connections can seem daunting for a member of an editorial page staff. Where do you find the time after the usual editorial page duties that include writing editorials and perhaps columns, attending too many meetings and trying to keep up to date on a variety of current issues?

Meet Glenda Holste, an editorial writer with the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. Her newspaper selected "Poverty Among Us," which looked at the aftermath of welfare reform in the area, as a seven-month project for 1998. Holste was on the planning committee, looking for a creative way for the editorial page to become involved in the project.

She found it through creation of the *Pioneer Press* book club, which drew hundreds of readers to examine the issues surrounding poverty through their already established book groups or by creating new ones. Holste consulted with experts at the St. Paul Public Library to draw up a book list that would complement the newsroom's project.

"The object was to promote community conversation," she says. "We wanted to find an innovative way to foster conversation and thinking."

On the days the newspaper ran each of its seven monthly reports, Holste provided a primary title for the month. Through her column she also provided feedback and reactions, reporting on what was happening in the community with the book club.

But that was only the beginning. The public library also produced an expanded reading list, which the newspaper made available on its Web site as a searchable mediography and mailed out in printed form to readers who requested it.

Holste and colleagues spoke at book club meetings, which included the American Association of University Women, neighborhood groups, church groups and two groups based at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul.



**"We wanted to find an innovative way to foster conversation and thinking."**

**—Glenda Holste,  
Editorial Writer,  
St. Paul  
Pioneer Press**

When the seven-month project ended the last week of August, Holste published a fall reading list for those who wanted to continue.

In her final column about the project, she noted that the club's activities "will have connected with at least 1,000 active readers and many more occasional readers, distributed more topical information than in any previous public interest project of the editorial board and, centrally, shared ideas across the community."

She continued, "it has been thrilling—and sometimes surprising—to learn how readers took the basic theme, the reading lists, and ran with the information.

"Individuals have asked for the list to use in a nuclear family. ... Book groups have used a title and brought in an expert speaker on the book's subject. The public libraries have distributed almost 2,000 copies of the project's short list of titles. We had an online chat with [one of the authors]. The American Library Association's task force on poverty and hunger asked for our mediography to distribute. Catholic Charities contributed its powerful book *Putting a Face on the Poor* to the poverty Web site. We had many inquiries about children's literature on poverty."

So what comes next? Holste left open the possibility of a repeat, ending her final column with a note of promise: "Will the *Pioneer Press* Book Club meet again in this space and in the community? We hope so when the subject is as compelling and the time is right."



## Conclusions

When the competitive advantages of newspapers are considered, the role of editorial pages remains at the very heart of many of them. They provide perspective on the news, placing it in a context that is meaningful to readers. Editorial pages provide leadership rather than simple reaction, because they have great leeway in choosing what is important to consider in depth. They also provide credibility, because they are produced by experienced journalists whose only mission is to help readers understand their world and comment on it.

Perhaps most important, they can be a critical link in the vital area of connection with the community. They are most effective in guiding community opinion, and a survey indicates that is where most of them place priority. They offer the opportunity for community comment, by soliciting letters and opinion pieces from citizens. They also listen to local groups in editorial board meetings.

In addition, many are expanding and experimenting with ways for more community involvement, through events honoring letter writers, community forums, community advisory boards and partnerships with other media, colleges and universities and libraries. They are involved in projects that seek citizen involvement in the electoral process, and they listen to community members and report on results.

Yet this part of the newspaper too often is taken for granted, not promoted and not valued. That's because, I'm convinced, its role is not viewed in the larger context of its strategic advantage to the newspaper.



In addition, I would argue that every newspaper function should be examined for its strategic value to the paper, and those with strengths and potential should be enhanced and exploited to ensure the survival and growth of the paper.

As the Rev. Thomas Shanks of Santa Clara University points out, "The newspaper is in a unique position to pull together people from a variety of viewpoints, get them to the same table and engage in conversation and see what the common places are and where it begins to divide."

The editorial pages are critical to a newspaper's fulfilling that unique role, to seeing that the opportunity is not squandered.

## About The Author

Lynnell Burkett is editorial page editor of the *San Antonio Express-News*. She spent the summer and fall of 1998 as editor-in-residence at NMC, Northwestern University's Media Management Center in Evanston, Ill. Before becoming editorial page editor in 1995, she was associate editorial page editor and Sunday columnist for the *Express-News*. She joined the *Express-News* after the 1993 closing of the *San Antonio Light*, where she also was editorial page editor.

She entered newspaper work after a 15-year career teaching journalism at San Antonio College, a 22,000-student community college, where she also helped advise the student newspaper and magazine. For seven years, she was chairman of the Journalism-Photography Department at the college.

A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, with a bachelor's degree in journalism and master's degree in communications, Burkett has been active in efforts to see that more minorities enter the journalism profession. She was founding director of a High School Journalism Workshop for Minorities at San Antonio College, worked with American Society of Newspaper Editors' job fairs for minority students and taught in numerous workshops for high school journalism students at Texas colleges. She also has worked with professional training programs for Arab journalists in Tunis, Tunisia.

Burkett is particularly interested in newspapers' connections with their communities, having worked with community advisory boards at the two San Antonio newspapers. She has been a board member of the National Conference of Editorial Writers, national president of the Community College Journalism Association and local president of the Society of Professional Journalists.