
Coastal Voices: Local news too valuable to lose

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It has been 1.25 yrs. since I retired after 10 years of working for the Del Norte Triplicate and 35 years working for the newspaper industry overall. It was in its heyday when I first started. The internet was just beginning to take off, so it hadn't had the chance to have much of an effect on this well-established industry.

I was on vacation taking a tour of a horse ranch in the Black Hills, of all places, when the owner of the ranch told me that the newspaper I was working for at the time, The Modesto Bee, had filed for bankruptcy. McClatchy, its' parent company, was the third largest newspaper chain in the country at the time and I was so proud to be a part of it.

My heart sank at the news. It was truly the end of an era. But it wasn't like I hadn't seen it coming. I had been telling people for a long time that the internet was going to take the newspaper industry down, but folks would just chuckle and say, "People will always like holding something in their hands while they read." There was no persuading them.

Soon, newspapers all over the country started calling themselves "media companies" as they struggled to get their news up on the web before it was too late for them. Many went down or filed for bankruptcy as they felt their way into this new world.

That's OK, you might say, because I get my news from the internet. But where does it all come from? It comes from college educated journalists at local newspapers and media companies connected to networks all around the country.

The Del Norte Triplicate is a member of the Associated Press (AP). It is a tiny link that connects our community to the rest of the world. When the tsunami happened in 2011 the news was delivered from local newspapers and radio stations right here out of Crescent City. The phones were ringing off the hook and our sleepy Facebook page came to life with photos and videos showing boats in the harbor basin being stirred around like potatoes in a pot of soup.

Local newspapers, no matter how big or small, hold the keys to local news that no one else has. How else would you find out how many touchdowns our high school football team scored and who was carrying the ball? How else would you find out what new businesses have opened in the area and what is happening to the rivers and forests in our world renowned National Parks as nature struggles with global climate change? How else would you find the music and theater venues in Del Norte and Curry Counties?

Yes, you might get your news off of Facebook or from a local blogger but is it accurate? Is it fair? Is it put together by trained professionals?

Over the course of the 11 years I've known of the Del Norte Triplicate, I have seen them go through two bankruptcies, transition to a stronger web presence, tighten their belts, and do whatever else they could to survive. During my time there, we struggled through the first bankruptcy while working on tight deadlines with a skeleton crew, but we made it.

Now we know (through reading the local newspaper, of course) that the Del Norte Triplicate and Curry Coastal Pilot are to be sold.

Many changes will be coming to our little newspapers here on the coast, as new owners bring in their experience and ideas to breathe new life into them. My hope is that they'll be strengthening their web presence even more, like McClatchy and The New York Times did a decade ago.

I am writing this letter to each and every one of you and asking that you all have patience while they go through their changes. Local news outlets are a precious commodity that we can't afford to lose.

I wish the employees the best of luck. I know your futures may be uncertain right now but, as I know through my own experience in life, you will come out strong in the end.

Gale Steelman lives in Crescent City.