DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 399 557 CS 215 492

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TITLE Back to the Future: The Resurgence of Community in American Society, and Community Journalism in the Newspaper Industry and Higher Education.
PUB DATE Aug 96
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (79th, Anaheim, CA, August 9-13, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Attitudes; Higher Education; *Journalism Education; *Newspapers; News Reporting
IDENTIFIERS Local News; Media Coverage

ABSTRACT

America is in the midst of the age of the emergent and enlightened community. Citizens increasingly demand from their newspapers high-quality, explanatory coverage of local issues. Newspapers large and small are responding. Community newspapers are growing, and many big city media outlets are rethinking their news coverage philosophy in terms of civic journalism. Civic and community journalism are two leaves on the same branch, alike and yet not the same. This paper discusses the similarities between the two, why the current trends are healthy, why teaching community journalism is important, and how to introduce and integrate a community journalism component into an existing journalism program. Contains 30 references. (Author/RS)

Back to the Future: The Resurgence of Community in American Society, and Community Journalism in the Newspaper Industry and Higher Education

Written for the AEJMC Convention, Aug. 10-13, 1996

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Abstract

America is in the midst of the age of the emergent and enlightened community. Citizens increasingly demand from their newspapers high-quality, explanatory coverage of local issues. Newspapers large and small are responding. Community newspapers are growing, and many big city media outlets are rethinking their news coverage philosophy in terms of civic journalism. Civic and community journalism are two leaves on the same branch, alike and yet not the same. This paper discusses the similarities between the two, why the current trends are healthy, why teaching community journalism is important, and how to introduce and integrate a community journalism component into an existing journalism program.

Back to the Future: The Resurgence of Community in American Society, and Community Journalism in the Newspaper Industry and Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

The country is in the midst of the age of the emergent, enlightened community (Withrow, personal communication, 1995). American cities and communities are experiencing a profound shift in the way they view themselves and their media outlets — especially newspapers. The resulting ferment has spurred the growth of community newspapers in smaller markets while causing many major metro media outlets to drastically rethink and retool their news coverage in terms of civic responsibility and public participation. Community journalism ("rural civic journalism" to some) in America is resurgent, at both the grassroots and classroom levels (Lauterer, 1996, p. 5).

This paper will discuss why the growth of community newspapers is a healthy sign of the times, how civic and community journalism complement each other, why teaching community journalism is more important now than ever, and how to introduce and integrate a community journalism component into an existing journalism program.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

Community is the buzzword of the '90s. The references to community abound at every turn.

- Anita Hill, speaking last spring at the Pennsylvania State University, said, "If I could give you anything, I would give you a sense of community."
- With her new book, Hillary Clinton has popularized the African saying, "It takes a village to raise a child."
- During President Clinton's State of the Union address this year there were no less than 15 references to "community."
- Last fall, an issue of the *New Yorker* featured a young woman running a small-town newspaper just north of the city (The New Yorker, 1995, September, 11, pp. 44-53).

• A recent *Smithsonian* magazine devoted eight pages to a story about a weekly newspaper in New Mexico (Smithsonian, 1995, October, pp. 89-98).

• In a guide book titled "Community Journalism: Getting Started" unveiled at their 1995 annual convention, the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation urged broadcast media outlets to become partners with newspapers as "a new way to cover tough issues" (The Radio and Television News Directors Foundation, 1995, p. 1).

• A bumper sticker seen on a city truck in St. Petersburg, Fla.: "COMM/UNITY: Different People; Common Ground" (Lauterer, personal observation, 1995).

• After the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, a survivor told an AP reporter: "Community is more than just a bunch of buildings — it's a feeling " (Associated Press, 1995, April 20).

Community is a hot topic because American culture has taken a philosophical swing toward all things more personal, and therefore smaller. In short, big is out, small is in. From user-friendly personal computers to "human scale" architecture (ex: Camden Yards), from the Mazda Miata to microbreweries, America's yearning for inclusiveness is reflected in the public demand for products that make the consumer feel recognized, affirmed and a part of something intimate and worthwhile (Withrow, personal communication, 1995).

One theory has it that the growth of this "communitarian" spirit is due in part to a backlash to the "me-first '80s." Nowadays, people crave inclusiveness, to be a part of a real community, a town with a strong sense of civic identity. As individuals we want and need to be recognized, valued and heard in the context of our towns (Withrow, personal communication, 1995). However, a city is not a community; it cannot nurture in the way a community can. That is why cities are evolving into what has been called "a community of communities" (Raspberry and Etzioni, 1995).

What is a community? The North Carolina poet Elizabeth Sewell writes, "As we seek the self-unraveling clue — A sense of place is but the beginning"

(Sewell, 1968, p. 31). Geographically, community is a discernible physical area encompassing few enough people that they can possess a definite sense of place, of open communication, of unity and of one-ness (Beittel, 1992, p. 27). Simply, that usually means smaller towns ranging in population from several hundred to several thousands. (Lauterer, 1995, p. 11).

There exists a second way of thinking about community. Philosophically, community can be said to exist when people share more than just geography, but also distinct core values, or an intellectual or professional orientation, ethnic background, religious persuasion, or even sexual preference.

So that within any major metropolitan city, various "communities" can and do flourish by nurturing and articulating their core values to their members. Affinity groups can range from the philosophical-intellectual (Portland, Oregon's community of poets), ethnic neighborhoods (Asheville, North Carolina's Greek Orthodox community), to ethnic-sexual orientation groups (the Irish-American Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Group of Boston). Each has its own identity, and very often a "community" newspaper to package news of specific interest to that constituency, while articulating and reinforcing the community's core values in an intimate, inclusive way that larger media can only mime at best (Lauterer, 1995, p. 11).

THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY

Though it is difficult to define a community newspaper by circulation numbers alone, a useful yardstick has been provided. The American Society of Newspaper Editors draws the line in the sand between large and small newspapers at the 50,000 circulation mark (ASNE, 1993, p. 2).

According to the 1996 *Editor&Publisher Year Book*, 84 percent of the nation's 1,533 daily newspapers are classified as "small newspapers" by ASNE. Of those 1,287 papers, 82 percent (1,061 papers) have circulations under 25,000.

In terms of the work force, 53 percent of all people working at daily newspapers in the United States work at small dailies (ASNE, 1993, p. 2-7).

In addition, there are 7,437 weeklies with an average circulation of 7,600 reaching 56.7 million readers — an all-time high (Newspaper Association of America, 1994, p. 21).

Ours is a country dominated in numbers by small newspapers, the overwhelming majority of which can be considered community newspapers by virtue of their fundamentally reciprocal and at times synergistic relationships with their host communities. Community newspapers, which throw much of their news and editorial weight behind providing local coverage and bringing the news home by finding the significant local angle to national and international stories, embrace their civic role by recognizing their public mandate to promote the general welfare of the community. The finest community newspapers recognize and accept this veritable covenant with their towns: that they are key stakeholders and players in the forces that help build and celebrate their communities. It is at this junction that community journalism intersects with civic and/or public journalism.

CIVIC/ PUBLIC JOURNALISM AND COMMUNITY JOURNALISM

Civic or public journalism dovetails neatly with community journalism at several junctions, but nowhere more succinctly than in the area of the public life of the community and/or city.

Writing for the ASNE spring 1996 convention in Washington, D.C., City Editor Rick Thames of the *Charlotte Observer* said, "Public journalism (or civic journalism) essentially means equipping readers with what they need to be responsible citizens."

The *Charlotte Observer*, with a circulation of roughly 240,000 in a city of 340,000 people, is not a community newspaper, and yet with the 1994 landmark public journalism project "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods," the *Observer* shed its detached perspective, got out of the newsroom, into the community and became involved with residents in a way very familiar to community journalists. Thames wonders about public journalists "treading the slippery slope" of

becoming too involved (Thames, 1996, pp. 1-3). Quality community journalists, too, spend much of their time negotiating that slope, constantly gauging the proper balance.

At smaller community newspapers, this dance along the edge is made even more treacherous because of economic considerations. Even as far back at 1948, Frank E. Gannett realized this ethical conundrum, saying, "The independent community newspaper has two incentives: to promote the general welfare and to make money. Like the physician, it (the newspaper) must be more concerned with the good that it does" (Freedom Forum, 1994).

Community journalists, by virtue of their natural proximity to their communities, don't have the luxury of what Jay Rosen calls "the illusion of themselves as bystanders." Any community journalist worth his or her salt would agree with Rosen when he asserts this perspective is "devastating" (Rosen, 1995). In community journalism, that detached attitude won't wash. "Stories generate immediate feedback," says Fran Smith, editor of the *Island Packet* of Hilton Head, S.C. "Knowing that we will face our sources and our subjects at the grocery store or in Town Hall or at the charity committee meeting helps keep us honest and fair" (ASNE. 1993, p. 3).

In the best cases, the conscientious community newspaper naturally practices many of the tenets of civic or public journalism. Former Milledgeville, Ga., *Union-Recorder* Editor Cecil Bentley sees that close contact as an advantage when it comes to reporting on issues and concerns. Bentley says working at a community newspaper provides "an opportunity to have an impact on the community. People see me as being involved with their concerns. At a small newspaper, you have the luxury of closely following and reporting on those issues. I think the public enjoys the connection they have with a community paper — a relationship that probably is not as strong at bigger newspapers" (ASNE, 1993, p.6).

Perhaps it is this untethered relationship at many larger papers that helped bring about public journalism. Arthur Charity suggests that a "widespread professional dissatisfaction" led to the "grassroots reform movement known as public journalism." He describes editors and reporters as "increasingly

restless with a style of journalism that just didn't seem to work" (Charity, 1995, p.1). But many successful community journalists would cheerfully take Charity to task over his blanket claim that all journalism isn't working.

Indeed, much of the discussion about public and civic journalism seems to begin with the unquestioned negative premise that something drastic is needed, in the words of Carl Sessions Stepp, "to jump-start a tired industry" (Stepp. 1995. p. 40), which, by inference, also includes community newspapers.

One of the founding fathers of public journalism, James Batten, spent years in community journalism and took a more positive and therefor more useful spin for newspaper people of all walks. Writing in *Editor&Publisher*, Thomas Winship quotes Batten's words to his flagship paper, the*Miami Herald*, "I think it's good that our people realize it's not enough to just lay out the wickedness of its world ... that they're also asking, How can I help my community? How can I help it do a better job?" (Winship, 1995, p. 32).

Helping one's community is one of the main support pillars of community journalism. "Helping public life go well," says Davis "Buzz" Merritt in his new book on public journalism, becomes a moral imperative for the newspaper, be it a community, civic or public newspaper (Merritt, 1995, pp. 113-114).

Merritt's basic tenets ("mental shifts") are so accessible and plain-speaking that they provide philosophical sustenance for all public, civic and community journalists alike:

- "It moves beyond the limited mission of 'telling the news' to a broader mission of helping public life go well, and acts out of that imperative.
- "It moves from detachment to being a fair-minded participant in public life ... it's practitioners remember that they are citizens as well as journalists.
- "It moves from worrying about proper separations to concern with proper connections.
- "It moves beyond only describing what is 'going wrong' to also imaging what 'going right' would be like.
- "It moves from seeing people as consumers — as readers or nonreaders, as bystanders to be informed — to seeing them as a public, as potential actors in arriving at democratic solutions to public problems."

The recent growth of civic or public journalism has thrust community journalism into the national spotlight. In reinventing themselves as newspapers primarily dedicated to their *communities' public interest*, the major metro dailies are paying tribute to the good works of thousands of dedicated, involved and conscientious community newspaper people nationwide. There are those who feel that the finest community newspapers have been doing civic/public journalism all these years at the grassroots level, quietly and without fanfare (Stiff, 1996).

- Reporters at the *Daily Courier*, a 10,000 circulation daily in Forest City, N.C., write weekly personal editorial columns, according to editor Ron Paris, partly as a way to stay connected, open, accessible and human to the readers (Paris, personal communication, 1996).
- The North Hills *News Record*, a 17,000 circulation Gannett community daily just north of Pittsburgh, Pa., assigns to each reporter a "reader advisory group" which meets occasionally with the reporter to provide honest feedback. According to executive editor Rich Leonard, this sort of accountability, or "strategic ascertainment," helps the newspaper focus on the real issues facing the community (Leonard, personal communication, 1996).
- The *Tryon (N.C.) Daily Bulletin*, a quarter-fold newspaper whose nickname is "the World's Smallest Daily Newspaper," and whose motto is "Multum in Parvo" (Much in Little), held a town-meeting-style forum titled "The Role of the Newspaper in Our Community: Spectator, Reporter, or Cheerleader?" The forum was co-sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and the local community college and was covered by the local National Public Radio station. Afterward, when the editor-publisher was told he had just practiced "civic journalism," he indicated he was unfamiliar with the term (Byrd, personal communication, 1995).

It would be easy to assume that civic or public journalism is the larger papers' spin for what the best and most forward-thinking community papers have done all along: keeping their doors open — both philosophically and physically, de-emphasizing conflict and the political minutiae in news coverage,

stressing problem-solving and reader involvement, while maintaining a weather eye to the larger picture of community change and growth. The better community papers have historically and naturally embraced their reciprocal relationship between their community (their public) and their mandate to provide coverage of civic and public affairs that is bold yet benevolent, success-oriented and positive without pandering (Lauterer, 1996, p. 12).

However, "It would be a mistake to assume that *all* community newspapers are doing civic journalism," says Kansas State University's John Neibergall, executive director of the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media. But he agrees with the assertion that the basic tenets of quality community journalism and civic journalism are more alike than they are dissimilar. Both are dedicated to what Neibergall calls "Community Building Through (Community) Journalism." (Neibergall, personal communication, 1996).

Cy Porter, writing in the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation reference "Community Journalism: Getting Started," argues that quibbling over labels is as silly and counterproductive as Nero fiddling while Rome burned. In the publication funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, Porter says: "Choose what name is most comfortable for you, but civic, community or public journalism is more than "plain old good journalism." This style of journalism not only enables you to provide your audience better coverage, but also opens an important community dialogue and creates a forum to help solve the day's pressing issues" (Porter, 1995, p. 1)

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

What is community journalism?

The fire in the belly of community journalism is best captured in the motto of the McComb, Miss., *Enterprise-Journal*. Below the newspaper's nameplate each day is found the forthright declaration of interdependence, "The one newspaper in the world most interested in this community."

According to recently published textbook on the subject, the label "community newspaper" and "community journalism" includes weeklies, semi- and tri-weeklies, small five and six-day-a-week dailies, and seven-day-a-week dailies with circulations up to 50,000 (Lauterer, 1995, p. xv), though many would argue that a newspaper has an increasingly difficult time retaining its innate neighborliness when its circulation creeps toward 30,000 (Byerly, personal communication, 1995). The healthiest community papers embrace their primary calling of emphasizing local news and attempting to localize any nationally-oriented story that they run. A successful community newspapers must cope with the temptation to grow to the extent that it loses touch with the basic tenets and endearing characteristics that gave it its distinctive identity in the first place.

Ken Byerly, community newspaper editor and University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill journalism professor emeritus, originated and popularized the term in the late '50s when he inherited a course at Carolina titled "Country Journalism." Thinking that label sounded too limited and provincial, Byerly re-titled the course and wrote a seminal book on the subject with the new name that reflected his philosophy: "*Community* Journalism" (Byerly, personal communication, 1995). Originally, the term "community journalism" referred only to small-town weeklies, mostly what used to be called "non-dailies" found in rural settings. But time and American society has broadened the scope of the definition to include community-minded dailies with circulations pushing that 50,000 figure (and sometimes exceeding it), as well as publications from affinity groups and niche communities within the larger geographical context.

Byerly and others argue that between the paper and the community there exists a mutually-beneficial, reciprocal relationship not found between the media and the city in most major metro centers. In the smaller setting a contract exists between the community and the newspaper. Both are dedicated to survival and quality-of-life issues, as well as to the Big Picture: where the community is going and how it intends to get there. In short: the enlightened community newspaper realizes "we're all in this together.'" If this philosophy resonates with civic/ public journalists, then that should tell us something (Byerly, 1961, pp. 25-26; and Lauterer, 1996, pp. 175-182).

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM ON THE FRONT BURNER

Just as *community* is a buzzword for society in the '90s, so *local news* is the hot button for the journalism industry. Readers crave and demand local news. As one Pennsylvania editor said bluntly: "Local news? It's the only game in town" (Sachetti, personal communication, 1994).

Community newspapers are uniquely positioned to take advantage of this wave of national interest in all things related to communities and local affairs. This phenomenon means savvy niche publications and enlightened community newspapers are in the right place at the right time doing the right thing (Lauterer, 1995, p. 208).

Weekly newspapers, by virtue of their publication cycle and format, have typically provided the most local-rich coverage of their communities. These "mothers of all community newspapers," have enjoyed a consistent rise in readership since the '60s, according to National Newspaper Association figures. Though the number of actual weeklies has decreased by 737 since 1960, the average circulation is at an all-time high of 7,629 and so is the total readership, topping out at a record high of 56.7 million (NAA, 1994, p. 21).

These glowing statistics fly in the face of the common doom and gloom newspaper readership figures coming out of major daily corporate offices. Weekly community newspapers have gained readership, in contrast with declining readership figures for the major metro dailies because community newspapers give their readers something most big dailies don't or won't provide (Dible, personal communication, 1996).

In addition to saturation local coverage, readers value physical accessibility, a critical common denominator found among successful community papers. In communities across the country, people still want to be able to walk through the front door at the hometown newspaper office and be able to talk to the reporter, editor or publisher. With that kind of neighborly, open-door policy, coupled with intensively local coverage, community papers are able to survive and in many cases thrive in spite of postal and newsprint cost hikes, big papers in their backyards, multiple TV/cable stations, and competing online services

(Lauterer, 1995, p. 10). It is no accident that the ASNE Small Newspaper Committee's latest brochure is titled "Thinking Big About Small Newspapers."

HIGHER EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY: "HOW 'M I DOIN'?"

When, in the mid-'80s, Charles Kuralt, speaking at a university commencement, challenged the media to become "relentlessly local," he might as well have been throwing down the glove to higher education as well.

Though it has taken another decade for Kuralt's dictum to take hold, the community "wave" has not gone unnoticed at America's universities. In 1993 Ernest Boyer called upon effective academic institutions to reassess themselves as " purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring and celebrative" communities (Boyer, 1993) . (Boyer's characteristics of an "academic community" sound remarkably similar to factors contributing to healthy life and growth in geographical communities.)

A recent Poynter seminar on the future of journalism concluded, "Today's journalism training needs revamping to match tomorrow's journalism" (Poynter Institute for Media Studies, 1994). The bottom line: whether institutions are named Colleges of Communications or old-fashioned "J-Schools," university-level journalism education must reinvent itself to keep pace with "tomorrow's journalism." We ought to be asking ourselves the same rhetorical question former New York City Mayor Ed Koch used to pose: "How 'm I doin'?"

For community journalism, the answer seems to be: Late but maybe just in time. National workshops, symposia and conventions on the subject are swamped with paper proposals (Neibergall, personal communication, 1996). Last year the Poynter Institute for Media Studies rewrote its mission statement and named "community" as one of four strategic initiatives. This spring Poynter introduced a first-ever seminar on community journalism as part of a new curriculum on community (Poynter Report, 1995, Fall, pp. 8-9). Last year, after a 20-year hiatus, Iowa State University Press published the first new textbook solely dedicated to community journalism (as defined in this paper). Many

colleges and universities are adding or planning to institute courses in community and or civic/public journalism (Poynter Institute, personal communication, 1995). New Mexico State University Professor of Journalism J. Sean McCleneghan takes it even a step further. "Community journalism is going to save journalism higher education," McCleneghan told a national academic symposium on community journalism in St. Paul, Minn., sponsored by the National Newspaper Association and Kansas State University (McCleneghan, personal communication, 1995).

WHY TEACHING COMMUNITY JOURNALISM IS CRITICAL

Many newsrooms harbor a hard-bitten old copy editor who judges leads by growling: "So what? And, "Who cares?" Journalism educators might ask the same of teaching a class in community journalism. Why teach the subject as distinct discipline? And why should anyone care about it?

Consider the following:

• Common sense and statistics agree that the great majority of print graduates from university colleges and schools of journalism and mass communications find their first print jobs at such newspapers. Of those taking full-time jobs with newspapers or wire services, 62.8 percent are working in cities with fewer than 100,000 residents (Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, 1996, p. 13).

• The success of these grads at these smaller papers invariably depends on how mentally prepared they are to work at what many might otherwise consider a less than ideal setting in terms of paper size, publication frequency, perceived prestige, resources, sophistication, market size and salary.

• And, that among such papers, all community papers are not created equal. Students need to be made aware of the different types of papers within the broader family of community newspapers so that they will be better equipped to make wise and appropriate job choices.

According to a new instructor's guide for community journalism, "The great majority of our grads won't find their first jobs at the *Washington Post*, the

New York Times or the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, They will find their first jobs at the *Sunbury Daily Item*, the *York Daily Record* and the *Pottsville Republican* — the latter of which are all excellent community papers that hire our graduates. We owe it to these young journalists to send them into those jobs skilled for, philosophically attuned to and informed about the unique opportunities and challenges inherent in practicing journalism in that venue" (Lauterer, 1996, p. 8).

However, many beginners suffer under the common misconception that the community paper is a nothing more than a smaller version of the big-city daily, as in "Honey, I Shrank the Newspaper!" Nothing could be further from the truth. The enlightened community paper plays a unique and vital role in the life of its community. Compared to many big metro dailies, most community newspapers have a fundamentally different approach to the factors of news judgment, and indeed — to every facet of the news business.

If community newspapers provide most of our students with their first internships and jobs, and if journalism higher education means to serve the needs of the newspaper industry, then journalism educators should be actively engaged in preparing reporters, editors, ad people, designers, photographers and newspaper managers for engaging work on the community level too.

Across the country, community newspaper editors and publishers express dismay at the surfeit of young talent adequately prepared mentally, philosophically and practically for the community newspaper milieu. Editor Lockwood Phillips of the Carteret County (N.C.) *Times-News* laments: "The trouble with college kids these days is that they think they have all the answers and they *don't* have the answers." (Phillips, personal communication, 1995).

It seems what newspaper people call "a no-brainer:" Journalism higher education is looking the gift horse in the mouth if it is not preparing students for their entry level jobs. If newspapers are to survive, reporting local news in the context of public participation and civic responsibility will be a fundamental part of that solution. If journalism higher education is in touch with its state's print industry, it will find that this public, civic or community approach to local news is of paramount importance to its constituency.

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM 2000

Ready or not, we are in the age of the emergent, enlightened quality community — communities which are increasingly demanding enlightened, quality, local news-oriented newspapers to not only keep pace but to lead them into the millennium and beyond.

In both higher education and community journalism, leaders are increasingly realizing the interconnectedness of disciplines and skills. Convergence, interactivity, integrative arts, multimedia — projects which are interdisciplinary, ensemble and collaborative drive the enlightened '90s' classrooms and newsrooms alike. The community journalism experience, which practically forces the journalist to think in a more holistic way, celebrates that confluence of synergies.

Mario Garcia of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies advocates an inclusive newsroom approach to story development called W.E.D. The abbreviation stands for Writing, Editing and Design — a team concept that embraces a holistic, collaborative and dynamic process for story development. It means that writers talk to editors who talk to photographers who talk to designers before, during and as the story is developing. The W.E.D. concept, says Garcia, provides a humane and creatively-rewarding framework for story development (Garcia, 1993, pp. 10-37). The community journalism setting is the appropriate environment for such a concept to flourish, and a class in community journalism is an ideal site to teach W.E.D.

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM 101: AIMS AND GOALS

While not discounting the importance nor significance of theoretical classes in communications, experience tells us college journalism students crave real-world, hands-on classes that yield tangible, practical experiences they can put to immediate use. Community journalism can be such a class. Additionally in its favor, initiating a community journalism class does not require a great deal of

money or sophisticated computers to teach community journalism. But it does take an administration and faculty with vision and courage — leaders and teachers who are in touch with the industry.

The instructor teaching community journalism soon discovers that much of what he is doing is "attitude adjustment." In a business that seems to be dominated by celebrity anchors, glitz over substance, tabloid TV, me-first journalism and infotainment, the students' natural inclination is to subscribe to the traditional bigger-is-better paradigm. It takes a special kind of teacher to get students excited about what they at first perceive as "hick journalism."

The instructor's most daunting task may be to convince students that "small is beautiful," and that "less is more." Community journalism is not settling for less, it is celebrating what is. Through positive modeling, the instructor's goal should be to help college students accept, respect and embrace community journalism as a distinct and eminently worthy discipline within the media pantheon. From our classrooms should emerge nothing less than The Complete Journalist for 2000 and beyond.

A course in community journalism gives the students a framework in which to contextualize what they have learned in newswriting, features, reporting, editing, advertising, graphics, design, photojournalism, history, law, ethics, newspaper management, media and society theory, and so forth. In community journalism it all comes together. Here, the student naturally begins to think holistically about the newspaper in all its facets as a living organism that exists only because of the fundamentally reciprocal and synergistic relationship with its community.

Teaching community journalism is of fundamental importance because so many journalism graduates need the information immediately upon graduation. — and if they intern at a community paper, then they likely need it no later than their junior year. Stories are legion of outstanding journalism grads, who, having landed their first job unexpectedly at a community paper, phone former professors with fundamental questions that they would never be asking if they had taken a class in the subject (Lauterer, 1996, p. 5).

This knowledge should fill the instructor with a sense of purpose. The aim of this course seems clear enough: to provide students with the requisite skills and attitudes to enable them to succeed in their first jobs, to empower them with the skills to successfully write, edit, shoot and design for community newspapers so that they may lead meaningful lives and find worthwhile work within the context of community journalism. Many will discover a satisfying life's work in this venue where the quality of life can be decidedly saner and more humane — especially in the case of family life (Lauterer, 1996, p. 6).

Yet even if the young reporter stays at the community paper for only several years before choosing to move on, she will be more professionally and philosophically mature, richer for the experience and more equipped experientially for leadership positions in larger markets. Community journalism may not be for everyone, but in journalism almost everyone starts there.

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM AND JOURNALISM HIGHER EDUCATION

Perhaps you are a journalism professor or administrator working at a respected school of journalism or college of communications within a college or university, and you have begun to sense there is something basic missing in your curriculum. Is your program adequately preparing your students philosophically, intellectually and physically for the jobs they will be offered in their 20s? To put it in a nut graph: Do your students graduate ready and able to write, edit, shoot, layout for a community newspaper? Do they understand the level of civic involvement and public accountability inherent in this profession?

STARTING BIG

Those were the kinds of questions Carol Oukrop began asking herself and her colleagues at Kansas State University in 1989. Oukrop, director of the A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications at Kansas State, recalls,

"Several of us in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at K-State had long felt the need to be doing more than we were with community journalism." She says, "Community and communication come from the same linguistic root. You cannot have community without communications. That is the deep-seated belief that led to the formation in 1991 of the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media, which is a part of the A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications at Kansas State University, The Center is appropriately named for McDill "Huck" Boyd, a noted Kansas publisher and state leader who was a firm believer in the values, lifestyles and resources of rural America. He believed, as we do, that media are the glue that holds a community together. They sustain a community's identity. They allow community members to communicate with one another, and they furnish information that citizens need to plan for their futures" (Oukrop, 1995, p. 284-285).

After a year of planning, Kansas State hired community journalist, John, D. Neibergall, who had owned and published four community newspapers in Iowa before beginning his graduate work at Iowa State University. Executive director of the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media since 1990, Neibergall says KSU "is pointing the way back to the future, back to journalism's roots, and into the future in which communities and their media reconnect. Kansas State has recognized the inseparable link between communities and communications. It has launched an enterprise that seeks to strengthen local media, thus equipping them to help build better communities" (Neibergall, 1995, p. 282).

Subsequently, Kansas State formulated the following mission statement for the Center:

- Interact with communities to determine their communication needs.
- Develop services and hands-on help for community media to meet those needs.
- Examine existing knowledge of the role that media play in the life of communities.
- Carry out research to add knowledge about that role.

• Contribute to the discovery, testing and implementation of appropriate processes, methods, technologies and structures.
• Expand and upgrade the community media dimension in higher education.
• Disseminate the Center's findings.
• Develop the resources needed to carry out its mission.

The planners further developed seven strategic tasks to translate the Center's mission into an active agenda:

1. Serving media and community.
2. Teaching.
3. Doing research.
4. Providing training.
5. Putting technology to use.
6. Linking people with information.
7. Nurturing the Center's leadership.

Oukrop says, "We are pleased with what we have been able to accomplish so far. In carrying out activities, both in our state and nationally, we believe we have created some models other schools might want to adapt to their own areas." (Oukrop, 1995, p. 286)

STARTING SMALL

Not every school has the vision nor leadership of a Kansas State. Still, much can be done by a skilled, dedicated single agent. Smaller, less ambitious, but still vital community journalism programs can be introduced and integrated into an existing journalism curriculum. Beginning in 1993 and acting alone, a single then-assistant professor at Penn State was able to institute an introductory course in community journalism which has now grown in popularity and scope to the extent that the students, faculty and administration recognize the

for its collaborative and real-world merits. It is not too early to say that the Penn State University College of Communications has energized its journalism program with a healthy dash of hands-on community journalism.

For a small-scale model, here are the ingredients for successful implementation and integration of a community journalism component into an existing, well-established journalism curriculum:

1. **Justification.** The proponent must have an well-articulated set of reasons and valid justifications for introducing a new course. For example, the Penn State argument:

• According to Federal guidelines on what comprises "rural" and "urban" areas, Pennsylvania is the most rural state in the nation. That is, more people live in towns of 2,000 and under than any other state.

• Well over three-quarters of the state's newspapers are "small newspapers," i.e., hometown community papers.

• Eighty seven percent of Penn State students come from Pennsylvania.

• The overwhelming majority of print majors at Penn State and elsewhere get their first jobs at community newspapers.

2. **Aims and Goals.** The proponent should craft a concise yet comprehensive mission statement. For instance, The mission of the Penn State community journalism course is three-fold: To equip young journalists with the basic skills of the profession to ensure their success in the field; to expose students to as many professional people and experiences as possible so that they can decide for themselves their own career path; and to provide for the state's many community newspapers a continuous pool of skilled, able and intellectually-prepared young journalists.

3. **Basic Requirements.** What it takes to start from scratch; the academic infrastructure:

- A professor with the necessary teaching skills and actual community newspaper experience, i.e. a former editor-publisher who is a proven academic professional with a successful class track record in higher education.
- A book (at the time, there was no current text book).
- The support from the journalism program chair as well as colleagues.
- An administration politically open to growth and change.
- Students excited about the course and concept.

4. **Long Range Goal; the Vision.**

- Statewide: to make the program relevant to the state's professional journalists by opening a dialogue between the College of Communications and the industry, by providing quality interns and young journalists, by involving the state's professional community journalists in the College's program through guest lectures and feedback from students studying the newspapers of the state.

- Schoolwide: to establish a community journalism cohort within in the faculty of the College of Communications, to draw on the skills of other professors in the College within and beyond the journalism program (Editing, Graphics, Photography, Broadcast Journalism, Media History) and to involve their classes in collaborative learning across traditional lines.

5. **Timetable:** It may take one year from the time the course is proposed until it is approved, another six months to scheduling, and another three months to start. Meanwhile, the prospective community journalism instructor may have to recruit students for his first class, answering the typical: "Like, what is community journalism anyway?"

6. **Format**: For the experimental first class, keeping the class size to no more than 20 is advised. If a class with 18 students succeeds, then the instructor, having found her sea-legs, can push for a larger class the following year.

7. **Selling the Idea**: The committed instructor can raise public consciousness for the course and the concept through hallway encounters with colleagues and administration. In addition, word of the College's "Community Journalism Initiative" can be spread through local newspaper columns, op-ed pieces, lobbying the state press association in general and individual community newspaper figures in specific. Supportive alumni and/or area community journalism professionals can make a significant contribution by guest lecturing, lobbying the administration, and returning home to tell other professionals of the College's new program.

8. **Single Course Best Scenario**: Most community journalism initiatives will have to start small, with a single course. If that is the case, what can the instructor hope to cover in Community Journalism 101? Through a balance of lecture, discussion, reading, guest lectures, in and out of class writing, and small group projects, the instructor can aim at cover the basics. Premise: There is a lot of ground to cover, and this class may be the students' only course in the following material: Community journalism philosophical foundations and guiding principals as well as community journalism's specific perspective on news, features, editorials, sports, lifestyle, ethics, emerging technology, photojournalism, graphics, newsroom management, business and start-ups.

9. **Theory Into Practice: a Class Newspaper**: In practical terms, journalism theory doesn't get into practice more effectively than in print. Publishing provides the most expedient and hands-on way for a journalism class to get turned *Inside-Out* — from *Inside* the sometimes all-too theoretical classroom to the vital *Outside* world (Dodson and Wood, personal communication, 1989). The sheer act of making ideas, dreams, stories, photos and graphics into ink-on-paper will galvanize the class, while turning it "inside-out." In addition, the instructor

will be "showing, not telling," while providing immediate relevance for the material.

A class newspaper may seem financially far-fetched, but if the support of the school or college's administration can be secured and if a generous and far-sighted community newspaper publisher can be enlisted, then this idea can take wings on a modest budget.

To make the publication relevant and useful, the newspaper might embrace a driving theme — a major issue facing the community. Example: Growth in Our Town. This accomplishes several implicit goals: the theme suggests a vital, unifying framework for stories and photos, and it infuses the publication and the class with editorial clarity, focus and direction. (See accompanying syllabus.) The scenario might unfold thus: The community journalism takes over the dormant lab newspaper. Under the instructor's direction, the class resurrects the publication as *their* newspaper — a community-oriented newspaper (24 pages, tabloid format, full-color front) to be published at the end of the semester as a climax to the class' efforts. In taking ownership of the project, the class renames the paper to suit its new identity, re-writes its mission statement, determines its audience and defines its community scope. The new newspaper will be the wholly-run project of the community journalism class, yet it can and should encompass and embrace the efforts of several other writing classes, also including photo, graphics and editing classes.

Benefits of this project appear endless. For starters, it gets several print classes into a hands-on, real-world production mode. It spurs interactive collaborative learning. It gives the instructor an active vehicle for teaching the Poynter Institute style of newsroom team management. In addition, the College can add this project to its web page as a community journalism showcase. From a practical standpoint, it gives many students by-lines and clips they would otherwise never get. Also, it provides the College with a pool of potential entrees in the Hearst Journalism Awards Program.

CONCLUSIONS

The community is ascendant in America today. The community — not the city — has emerged as the most viable social unit of the '90s. Increasingly, community is becoming the focal point for all facets of American life, the vehicle by which meaningful change can occur in society, and, to borrow a phrase, the habitat for humanity. A community can be defined as a smaller population center where individuals are cherished for their self-ness, a contiguous geographical place where inhabitants, sharing core values and social mores, possess a highly-defined sense of place and a strong civic identity.

This paradigm shift away from the bigger-is-better assumption favors media outlets which serve communities. If a newspaper is located in such a place, and if the newspaper's circulation is no more than roughly 50,000 — and most importantly — if the newspaper embraces its fundamentally reciprocal and at time synergistic relationship with its host community, then it can be called a true community newspaper. These community newspapers are uniquely positioned to take advantage of this national community wave if their news presentation is "relentlessly local," and their editorial voice supports an pro-active and open forum for positive community growth. Newspapers that serve this sort of grass-roots hometown function, placing their emphasis unashamedly on local coverage, can compete successfully against other media outlets, most notably television and nearby large metro dailies. Circulation figures for American weeklies are at an all-time high.

City newspapers, too, are recognizing the power of community as a unifying factor. "Reconnecting with readers" is a popular banner under which civic or public journalists rally. Major metro editors talk about their city as "my community" in spite of the fact that it may be the state capital with a population of 250,000. Catching the community spirit, many forward-thinking journalists in the larger markets are engaged civic journalism projects. Civic journalism intersects with community journalism in so far as both "big" and "little" newspapers recognize their public mandate; they are both fundamentally devoted to civic problem-solving and serving as an active agent for growth of

public life. Community journalism , as defined here, has even been called "rural civic journalism" (AEJMC Civic Journalism Interest Group News, 1996, p. 4).

On the other hand, civic journalism projects are more likely to be undertaken by a newspaper with a larger circulation (over 50,000) and located in a larger metropolitan area generally thought of as a city.

Together — the resurgence of community in America, the historical strength of the American community newspaper, and in 1988, the introduction of civic or public journalism — all combine to focus attention on an old and yet new form of journalism. Together, civic and community journalism, the new journalism of the '90s, is changing the face of American journalism. It is becoming a more humane and human face.

Journalism higher education has begun to respond. New books are being published; new classes are being offered. Enlightened and courageous schools of journalism and colleges of communications and mass media are catching the wave, much to the benefit of their students, most of who find their first jobs at community newspapers where civic and/or public journalism can be and often is practiced in its original, natural, grassroots state.

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