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MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
In which a lowly, unpaid intern observes the wacky world of Washington, D.C. Yukari Usuda
**Note from the Editor**

WHILE NOT STATISTICALLY significant to the Bureau of the Census, the School of Journalism has experienced a recent wave of migration from the South, and a most beneficial one. This year we welcomed a dynamic duo, our two new photojournalism and design professors, Jackie Bell from Tennessee and Keith Graham from Mississippi. Their hard work and enthusiasm has paid off as interest in the photo-J program continues to rise and students continue to garner national awards.

Now we welcome Jerry Brown from Alabama as our new dean. After a 20-year tenure at Auburn University, Jerry has a sterling reputation for his dedication to journalism and his humanistic approach to academic administration. You’ll get an insight into his philosophy by reading his piece—but you’ll have to meet him to get the full impression.

Another new face on our faculty, Denny McAuliffe, claims no Southern heritage. But it is his membership in the Osage tribe of Oklahoma that helped us hire him, for a year at least, from his job as foreign desk copy editor at the Washington Post. With a generous grant from the Freedom Forum, Denny is our Native American professor in residence; he’s also been busy recruiting more Indian students and teaching journalism courses at UM and at Salish-Kootenai Tribal College in Pablo. In the cover story, Denny writes about the generally poor coverage Indians in the United States receive from the press—and the poor media relations the tribes themselves are responsible for.

Denny and Keith teamed up to teach the Native News Honors class this year, leaving Carol VanValkenburg, who’s taught it every year since its inception but was unable to do so because of her interim dean duties, feeling a bit wistful. To catch the flavor of what students go through in the course, see the photo story that follows.

In Big Sky Country, Lee Enterprises is the dominant player, with four major dailies and a string of acquisitions of smaller dailies and weeklies, as well as broadcast properties. Beth Wohlberg and Zach Dundas analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Lee chain in Montana. And Rob Dean, M.E. of The New Mexican, tells what happened when Gannett swallowed the paper, then was forced by its former owners to cough it back up.

One price of corporate ownership and its profit-seeking rein on the bottom line has been the impact on copy editors, who are called on more and more to design and paginate, leaving less time and personnel for careful copy editing and proofreading. Read David Crisp’s excellent piece for the hairy details. And for a lighter look on the technological wonder called email, read John Reed’s story.

Environmental journalist Michael Frome has written a provocative piece on what he sees as the perils of objectivity; the Society of Environmental Journalists responds.

At our biennial spring Freedom of Information conference co-hosted by the UM Law School, the FOI Hotline and SPJ, Prof. Dennis Swibold and grad student Katja Stromnes presented compelling evidence on problems of access to electronic records. See also Beth Britton’s story assessing the outcome of a recent FOI win for the Montana news media, opening up legislative caucuses.

Beth reported on the legislative session, as did Kathy McLaughlin, who writes about potential conflicts of interest in the Capitol press corps.

This issue is rich in photo features. See James Shipley’s compelling story on an AIDS refuge in Honduras and Ronald Erdrich’s “Epiphany.” Photo-J teaching assistant Nellie Doneva writes about new photo-J magazines on the web, and recent master’s graduate Yukari Usuda tells in her own wry way about interning in Washington, D.C. Enjoy!
Meet Jerry Brown

Our new dean shares his vision of the School as the home of journalistic ideals, professional skills and robust debate.

At the conclusion of Faulkner's "As I Lay Dying," Anse Bundren, back from burying his first wife and getting himself some new false teeth, points to a strange woman he's brought home and tells his stupefied children, "Meet Mrs. Bundren." I can identify with that woman as I move into new surroundings, take on a new title and introduce myself to the University of Montana community.

A social practice in these parts is to inquire where a newcomer is from—the sense of place being so important—and then to labor to find connections, preferably cousinships. Though that custom is fading, even here, I found its counterpart in Missoula.

When I visited the University of Montana School of Journalism for interviews in April, enough similarities were pointed out to indicate that in our approaches to teaching, our relationships to our constituencies and even in some of our problems, we were indeed kin.

What I had heard earlier from nationally respected administrators about the Montana program was confirmed in my meetings with faculty, students and search committee members. To a person, they were frank and cordial; as interviews turned into conversations, Montana and Auburn, so far apart geographically, drew closer.

We discussed my experiences as an English teacher, weekly newspaper editor, journalism professor and department head. We also explored what the school and the university wanted in a dean, and I was asked to present my vision of journalism education.

As I recall, the three highest-minded points went about as follows:

- Journalism schools are custodians of the most fragile yet most essential institution in the American democracy, and we must constantly remind others in this cynical world of its constitutional primacy.

Each year, I have asked students in my press law class to memorize the First Amendment; most often they roll their eyes and reluctantly comply. This year, however, the student newspaper editor had to fight censure by the student government for not demonstrating "tact" in her criticism of a powerful trustee.

Here, with the 20th century drawing to a close, the struggle for a free press was renewed in its historical trappings. Fortunately, the editor won the battle, and she and her staff learned how their generation must assert First Amendment rights.

Journalism schools should not shy away from teaching other ideals—among them, responsible reporting and public service. I'm still naive
enough to believe the public respects the truth, values accuracy, likes to see the underdog represented and appreciates news organizations that have the courage to confront authority. I also believe such organizations can make enough money to maintain their integrity.

Journalism professors in an applied program are, at once, fully professional and fully academic—which is not as theologically complex as it sounds. To be effective teachers we must keep current our professional skills as we join with practitioners outside the academy.

We learn from them; they hire our graduates (many are themselves alums); they seek and give advice; and they support the school, the university and the cause of higher education. We have no more valuable friends or allies.

And yet, we are also academicians, probably hewing as close as any discipline these days to the pedagogy of Plato and Aristotle. Journalism students are learning to apply language and image, practically, in the roar and confusion of the marketplace, to inform the public, to seek the truth, to define the good life and to argue for right courses of action. They are learning the value of knowledge and of credibility, our principal stock in trade.

As interlocutors between the university and the world of practice, journalism professors depend on colleagues in the other units of the university to broaden the education of our majors, who are preparing for a profession that must, preposterously at times, take all knowledge for its province.

Likewise, when it comes to studies of the media and to the matter of presenting complicated or controversial ideas to the reading and viewing public, we hope our colleagues count on us to instruct their majors and to offer them help.

Though journalism faculty members defend the media generally, we are also obligated to study, analyze and, if necessary, criticize the fourth estate. The robust debate we are so fond of fostering over political and social issues must also be encouraged within the professional and academic communities. And the result should be scholarship that invites all participants—inside and outside the university—to enter the stream of public discourse.

Finally, I know the value of a degree in journalism, because I have spent 20 years counseling students and watching them leave to become newspaper and television reporters, editors, photojournalists, publishers, public relations executives, lawyers, preachers, even politicians.

All require the discipline reinforced in good journalism schools: For starters, the ability to write clearly and concisely, to think and read critically, to learn quickly, to address a broad public spectrum, to meet deadlines and to gain the insights, compassion and judgment that come from writing about all sorts and conditions of humanity.

If graduates also know the technology of radio and television and acquire the skills associated with computer-assisted reporting, editing and design, they will be among the best equipped to succeed in whatever communications world the heralded millennium brings.

What I did not say but should have in my round of interviews and presentations is that I believe a university education begins in the interaction between one professor and one student. If that relationship is sound, from it develops the life-long affection students have for their alma mater and their profession, whatever it turns out to be.

Here ends what might be called, without too much of a stretch, a vision of journalism education. It’s idealistic, perhaps simplistic, but it is based on real experience. As a meet-the-new-dean introduction, I hope it provides a summary of basic beliefs and principles. Like Mrs. Bundren, I am stumbling into the University of Montana as a rank stranger, seeking the advice and assistance I’ll need to fit into the family.
Barriers to electronic information?

In this age of information, journalists still struggle to gain access to electronic information

**By Dennis Swibold**

When Associated Press statehouse reporter Bob Anez asked how much it would cost for electronic copies of Montana’s purchasing records, he was told the fee was $1,700.

The estimate included not only the cost of a programmer’s time, but charges for such things as utilities, janitorial services, even employee benefits. Outraged, the AP refused to pay. Fortunately, it got a copy of the same information from another state agency for $237.

And when a UM journalism student recently asked the state attorney general’s office for a database of convicted felons, officials at first said the information wasn’t available. After much argument and many phone calls, they eventually agreed the data was indeed public and technically available but said they couldn’t spare the manpower to produce it.

Stories such as these aren’t uncommon. As more of the public’s information is stored in computer databases, citizens and journalists in Montana and elsewhere are struggling to get at it and finding cost among the obstacles.

For reporters, those databases represent a wealth of information on how government does the public’s business, and computer analysis has made it possible to do stories that might otherwise never make print:
- In Florida, a reporter married a database of property damage caused by Hurricane Andrew to another database that mapped neighborhoods according to how much wind they received. To his surprise, he learned that much of the damage occurred in areas outside those hardest hit by the storm. The result was a damning series of stories about shoddy building practices and home inspection in South Florida.
- In Washington, D.C., reporters analyzed crime and police databases to show that D.C. police are more likely to use “deadly force” that police in other high-crime metropolitan areas. Their series won a Pulitzer Prize.
- In Montana, an AP reporter examined a database of 3,400 fish and game violations and set conventional wisdom on its ear by showing that resident Montanans are far more likely to commit serious offenses than out-of-staters, who nonetheless routinely receive harsher punishments.

As the promise of computer-assisted reporting beckons, reporters in Montana and elsewhere are waging not only the age-old fights over which records the public is entitled to see but how much it should cost to see them.

As cash-strapped government agencies face growing demands for electronic information, some see the opportunity to cash in. Others are at least tempted to recoup their costs of inputting, storing and maintaining their databases by charging access fees, fees that threaten to push the cost of public information beyond the means of average citizens.

“Clearly the issue of public access to government information stored in computers — and how much the public is forced to pay will be the future FOI battlefield in Montana, as it already is in other states,” says John Kuglin, Montana’s AP bureau chief.

With agencies pleading poverty and journalists conceding only the most minimal charges, lawmakers and judges are creating a patchwork of policies that reflect the tensions.

State laws on electronic records are generally split into two camps: those that allow agencies to charge “reasonable fees” to
recover their costs of creating, maintaining and providing access to public information and those that permit agencies to recoup only the “actual costs” of making the information available.

For journalists, the “reasonable fees” standard is rarely reasonable in practice. Its vagueness almost always gives agencies the upper hand in negotiations for data.

“I hate the word ‘reasonable’ when it comes to data charges,” says Drew Sullivan, a specialist in database reporting for the Nashville Tennessean and a pioneer in computer-assisted reporting. “That can mean just about anything.”

Agency data people are much more aware of the charges than they have been in the past, Sullivan says. Faced with stingy budgets and pressures to replace outdated equipment and programs doomed to the Y2K trash heap, many officials are pushing up the price of public information.

“Left to their own devices, they will charge ridiculous fees,” Sullivan says.

In Montana, requestors are entitled by law to a free half-hour of data copying. After that, the state can charge for employee time, providing that it doesn’t exceed about $11 an hour. Officials can also charge for the computer disk or tape, unless requestors provide one of their own. The law also allows agencies to charge for mainframe processing time, for providing online access to information, and for “other out-of-pocket expenses associated with the request for information.”

Until recently, Montana journalists had few complaints on the subject, says the AP’s Kuglin.

“Until last year, reporters covering the statehouse hadn’t been getting charged for getting databases from state agencies,” he says. “Either agencies didn’t know what to charge under the Electronic Records Law enacted in 1991, or they may have figured that reporters needed the databases so they could inform the public.”

But that’s changing as officials in Montana and elsewhere reassess the demand for access and consider the potential revenue.

Colorado law, for example, allows agencies to collect “a reasonable portion of those costs associated with building and maintaining information systems.” To soften the blow, the agencies may waive the fees if the requestor can prove that he or she is a journalist or researcher and that the informa-

That’ll be a thousand bucks, please

Survey of public access to electronic records in Montana shows glaring inconsistencies

By Katja Stromnes

Learning what access there is to public records stored on computers in Montana is easier than one might think.

Just call a department, ask for what you want, and somebody will eventually call you back with information on what records are available, how they can be obtained and how much they cost.

But if it’s consistency you desire, you won’t find it.

A 1999 telephone survey of state officials in eleven offices at the state government during the months of January and February shows glaring inconsistencies among offices in handling public requests for state electronic records.

Though most acknowledged that public information is available on paper, the most common response to electronic records requests included fear that they weren’t legal, confusion about removal of private information and uncertainty about cost.

Some officials said the cost is nothing, while others estimated thousands of dollars and many hours to complete a request.

To their credit, many state officials are dealing with electronic upheaval with the slow emergence of a new computer software system, and others continue to operate antiquated database systems, making it difficult to know how long it takes to fulfill a request. Many haven’t been asked before.

The following are examples of attempts to obtain electronic records from Montana offices, a smattering of responses that illustrate the problem.

• At the Department of Justice office in Deer Lodge, Lee Bangs, administrative
tion will be used for "a public purpose."

For journalists, it's hard to decide which aspect of such laws is the most offensive: Making requestors shoulder the burden of maintaining information taxpayers have in theory already paid for, or allowing officials to determine who is a journalist and examine their motives?

The growing tendency of state officials to view themselves as vendors of public information is no stranger to Montana. "In its tussle with The Associated Press over releasing a copy of the state's purchasing database, the state Department of Administration wanted to bill the AP $44 an hour for computer programming, even though its highest paid programmer was paid less than half that amount. In addition to paying the programmer's salary, the agency asked the AP to pay for associated costs such as utilities, janitorial and security services and employee benefits.

Nor did the issue end when the AP found its information elsewhere. The agency drafted a bill for the 1999 Legislature that would have allowed state agencies from the statehouse to the courthouse to set their own fixed rates for providing information.

clerk, said there is a $300 set-up fee to get car titles or registration records in electronic format. He also charges an additional $30 for 1,000 names. To get the information hard copy, he charges $40 for 1,000 names.

He also requires a signature and explanation for use.

Bangs said, "No mailing lists, no selling of names. If we do find out they're selling to someone, we will stop them. We won't let them do it anymore."

• In Helena, at the Board of Crime Control, management analyst Don Crabbe said it would cost less than $100 to transfer a database of crimes on a ZIP drive.

Yet, at the office where the sexual and violent offender database is being created and soon to be complete, Mike Batista, administrator of criminal investigation, said he "won't assign a cost to public information."

• At the Department of Administration, state payroll information will not be released electronically because the office is in the midst of installing a new computer system.

"The law didn't even say the rates had to be reasonable," says Kuglin.

In a meeting with agency officials, Kuglin and members of Montana's Freedom of Information Hotline argued that the fees were probably unconstitutional, "like a poll tax." They also argued that because public employees are paid by the public, any additional charge for their services would be "double dipping."

Agencies, they argued, have a duty to make the public's information as available as possible, and that means keeping costs low and maintaining data in formats that make it easy to access.

For Kuglin, the kicker was a government attorney's comment that agencies have no duty to reformat electronic files to provide information to the public if the agencies believe this would be "burdensome."

"Gee, what a precedent this would set," he says. "Every time you ask for a public record, the government tells you, no, this would be burdensome."

And so what if agencies are flooded with requests for electronic information, Kuglin asks. "What else could they possibly be doing that is more important than serving the public?"

• Bob Meismer, supervisor of information services at the State Auditors Office, said he would never provide public information electronically because of the potential for abuse.

"We don't want to make it easy for (compilers of mailing lists)," he said.

On top of that, he said it would take too much staff time.

• Barney Benkelmen, administrator of data processing at Fish, Wildlife and Parks, also initially said that hunting license records would never be given out of his office in an electronic format.

Technically it's possible, he said, but he also feared use for mailing lists. He volunteered, however, that each year workers from Stonydale Press in Stevensville come in and electronically copy records for two cents a name. When pressed, he said that an electronic copy could be legally obtained.

• At the Department of Commerce, division administrator Steve Meloy of professional and occupational licensing was
In the end, the agency dropped its bill, citing "the complexity of the issues." Although he's optimistic that the press and public will ultimately prevail because Montana lawmakers have traditionally been sympathetic to open-records issues, Kuglin expects the matter of information costs to resurface in the Legislature and eventually make its way to the courts.

In the meantime, Montana journalists might consider aspects of laws in other states. In Alaska, for example, agencies may charge only the "actual incremental cost" of duplicating a public record kept in an electronic format. Fees for copying may not exceed a standard, nominal amount and no charge can be made for personnel costs unless a requestor has exhausted an allotment of five free hours of copying and searching per month.

In practice, it means that the cost of most requests for public records should amount to no more than the cost of a computer disk, and then only if the requestors don't provide one.

Alaska's law also states that if a database of public records contains both public and private information, as many do, the public agency must delete or suppress the private information and provide the remainder at the standard copying fee. They may not claim, as agencies in some states do, that running such a computer query constitutes the creation of a "new record" and therefore the requestor should bear additional costs.

In their search for ways to make their data pay, many agencies are drawing distinctions between providing access to public records — which they will do at minimal costs — and providing "electronic services and products," for which they'll charge competitive rates.

Such services in some states include providing online access to databases or bulletin boards, running a requestor's special query through public databases (rather than simply providing the database), providing information in an alternative format not used by the agency, providing copies of proprietary software developed for the agency, and generating maps from geographic information systems (GIS) for marketers and developers who are often eager to pay for the service.

Another looming concern is the "privatization" of government recordkeeping, or the practice of agencies farming out their data to profit-seeking companies.

However, at the Department of Labor and Industry, human rights commission decisions will be on the Internet soon.

Finally, at the Department of Health and Human Services, communicable disease statistics are given out for free electronically.

Vital statistics can be purchased for $10 to $50, said Chief Debra Fulton.

But perhaps the most rounded response came from Mike Billings, administrative operator for the department.

"(Electronic records are) an overwhelming aspect of our operation," Billings said. "We have more data here than people in the world."

The many possible ways to manipulate data lead to confusion for state officials who want to handle consistently the transfer of public information stored on computers, department public information officer Ken Pekoc said.

"What's a reasonable request?" he said. "We're trying to know where to draw the line. That's the challenge."
data processing to private companies, who may then charge citizens for the privilege of seeing it.

But even as journalists wrestle with these trends, the picture isn’t entirely bleak. In some regards, public records are more public than ever, thanks to the improving technology of the Internet.

Faced with burgeoning demands for information, many state, federal and local agencies are putting their databases in searchable form on the Internet where anyone with a computer and modem can get at them.

Although Montana’s offerings are still painfully limited, citizens enjoyed unprecedented access to updated legislation and hearings information via the 1999 Legislature “LAWS” site on the Internet. The state’s laws are in searchable form on the Web.

At the federal level, agencies such as NASA, the Census Bureau, the Security and Exchange Commission, the Federal Railroad Administration and the Federal Elections Commission are putting more of their data online and in searchable form.

In the battle to keep public information free and accessible, journalists should be encouraging city councils, school boards and legislatures to appropriate more money so agencies can make their records available free on the Web.

Even so, journalists and citizens can’t afford to relax in their fight for and support of laws that provide broad, inexpensive access to government databases, says Rebecca Daugherty, who oversees FOI services for the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.

“The key concept I think is (that fees) not exceed the actual cost of providing the records,” she says. “This means absolutely no assumption of agency costs for creating the info or putting it in a format it selects.

And in the fight for good law, she says, it’s critical that journalists and citizens become more savvy about today’s information technologies. That means understanding exactly how government information is stored and transferred.

“It means that if a reasonable and close to actual cost of providing, for instance, one driver’s record is $5, the law must not then allow the DMV to multiply $5 by the number of drivers in the database to give out the database,” she says. “This happens all the time.”

In some cases, technical expertise may be just as important as good law, says David Milliron, special projects database editor for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Georgia, he notes, allows state agencies to charge for administrative services involved in producing the document, including programming time, provided the agency uses the lowest paid employee capable of performing the task, and that the work is done in the most efficient manner. (The first 15 minutes are free, which covers most disk-to-disk transfers.) An agency must also provide an estimate before any work is completed.

“Great law,” Milliron says, “but that’s not to say I haven’t had to negotiate a $3,200 estimate down to $143.69 as I did last week. That’s where having good technical sense helps.”
Revealing the invisible minority

Telling the Indians’ stories has rarely been done well, but now it’s more critical than ever.

By Dennis McAuliffe Jr.

Nearly two centuries after Indians led Lewis and Clark into the pantheon of American heroes, tribes again must provide guides for the newest explorers of Indian Country.

Today’s media need a Sacajawea, the young Shoshone woman who guided Lewis and Clark safely on their expedition through Indian Country. The media in fact need 550 Sacajaweas, one for each of America’s federally recognized tribes. Unfortunately, Indian Country today remains just as mysterious and unknown to our reporters and editors as it was to the American explorers in 1804, standing on the eastern bank of the Missouri, facing west, about to get their feet wet.

The good news is that, after decades of looking the other way, the media finally have a couple of volunteers of undaunted, but untested, courage: The Washington Post’s William Claiborne, reporter of its newly created Indian beat, and his competition at The New York Times, Timothy Egan. They appear willing to explore parts of Indian Country not occupied by casinos, a Brave New World where few reporters have gone before.

But they, and others who may be inspired to try to follow their trail, need some help along the way. So far the tribes are not providing it.

Without Indian guides, mainstream media only perpetuate a longstanding tendency to treat tribes according to one or more of these familiar patterns: as problem people obstructing progress; as historical curiosities stripped of any present-day realities; as simplistic embodiments of various stereotypes (poverty, crime, alcoholism); or as existing outside mainstream American society, and having nothing to offer but casinos and welfare cases. Thus, the media are devoting valuable newsprint and airtime to missing the point: They are unable to see the important Indian story taking place today.

American Indian stories are arguably the most inaccurate being done in journalism today. There is perhaps no other area of American society in which reporters routinely get their facts wrong—and get away with it. Their editors don’t know enough about Indians either to notice, correct or chastise, or to demand better.

Rare is the tribe that does not complain about its media coverage. Tribal leaders and members alike, along with the watchdog Native American Journalists Association (NAJA), routinely say there have been few stories written so far about Indian issues—be they tribal sovereignty, Indians’ tax status or casinos—that are not wrong one way or another. NAJA has no shortage of candidates for its annual Columbus Award for the most insulting story of the year about Indians.

Alarmingly, the frequent inaccuracies of Indian reporting are adding fuel to an incendiary anti-Indian movement aimed at curbing tribal rights. Those stories are correctly and widely reported because anti-Indian spokesmen don’t require any cultural translating for the media. On the other hand, stories that might educate readers on either ongoing injustices or the evident benefit of tribal...
sovereignty to state and local economies tend not to be written, for reasons that remain a mystery to tribes.

Montana offers a good example: Elouise Cobell, a Blackfeet tribal member and banker on the Blackfeet Reservation, is the lead plaintiff in a historic class-action suit aimed at correcting alleged mismanagement by the federal government of individual Indians' trust funds. Its settlement reportedly could be the largest in U.S. history, dwarfing even the multi-billion dollar S&L scandal. Yet Cobell has complained that not a single reporter from Montana's media has interviewed her—with the exception of a student working on a class project at the University of Montana School of Journalism.

Some national and regional news organizations are doing a better job on the Indian story than their state and local counterparts. The Seattle Times regularly covers Indian controversies, and won a Pulitzer Prize for a series of reports on what it called a scandal surrounding federal housing on reservations.

The western regional Lee Enterprises newspaper chain started an Indian beat, hiring a Native American reporter, Jodi Rave, a Mandan-Hidatsa from North Dakota, to cover tribes in nine states, including Montana. However, few readers beyond her base, Nebraska's Lincoln Star-Journal, have seen much of her reporting; other Lee newspapers, including Montana's The Missoulian and The Billings Gazette, appear resistant to publishing her take on Indian issues affecting the tribes in their backyards.

The Washington Post last year assigned veteran reporter William Claiborne to its Indian beat. His front-page stories have raised reports from Indian Country to a higher level of intelligence: the casino-rich Coeur d'Alene Tribe's community outreach efforts that led to opening a tribal medical clinic and Wellness Center for its poorer non-Indian neighbors in Idaho; the thin blue line of Indian law enforcement stretched across vast reservations; the inability of Indians to get mortgages; and threats by Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt to build a moat around the Goshute Reservation to prevent it from accepting nuclear waste.

The Post's decision to launch the Claiborne Expedition was in part a response to increased Indian coverage by The New York Times, especially a series on tribal sovereignty by Seattle bureau chief Timothy Egan. Egan's exploration of Indian Country has been facilitated by Jim McCarthy, who runs a Washington, D.C. public relations firm specializing in Indian issues.

The tribes that have hired McCarthy, other P.R. firms or media-savvy press secretaries—the Coeur d'Alenes employ veteran TV newsman Robert Bostwick—are the exceptions. Most tribes have flunked public relations and their own media obligations. They've produced some great and clever lawyers and economists; now they need some P.R. pros. Tribes' efforts to generate good press remind me of how my stepson, Adam, used to date in high school: He sat by the phone and waited for someone
resembling Cindy Crawford to call and ask him out.

Like it or not, news-gathering in the late 1990s relies heavily on contacts between reporters and P.R. people. Reporters today get more press releases, press conference transcripts, faxed statements, reports and studies than they have time to throw away—but nothing from tribes. Tribes should try to manufacture good press and media relations as intently as they try to come up with other money-making ventures. The payoff could be bigger.

In many ways, in fact, the Indian conflicts of today are public relations battles; it’s public opinion that Washington lawmakers measure—not territory—when they make decisions affecting Indians’ future. The only time that Indians had a fighting chance against the intruders on their land and ways of life, they took the weapons of the white world and used them better than the soldiers did. Custer’s Last Stand here in Montana was, says writer Ian Frazer, “the last good time Indians ever had.”

The weapons of today are press releases, story suggestions, news conferences, contacts with reporters. Opponents of Indians have stockpiles of such weapons at their disposal. Yet there isn’t a reporter out there, among the few who cover Indians, who doesn’t complain that all communication lines into Indian Country seem to lead to some black hole. They can’t get Indians to answer their phones, much less to return their calls.

The losers in all this are readers, each of whom, given the chance, would gobble up good Indian stories with their morning cereal. Because of our history, or at least our mythology, Indians rank right up there with God, presidents and movie stars as having near universal appeal among Americans. By their nature, Indian stories are compelling and dramatic; they are at once evocative of our history and illustrative of the epoch struggle against adversity that made this country great—at the Indians’ expense.

In the Indians’ unique case, they are struggles that our history failed to resolve, and that are still engaging their descendants. Remarkably, they are struggles that Indians now have a chance to turn to their advantage and, who knows, even win. And, to many Americans, this resurgence of Indians is disconcerting, even un-

New ideas for Indian stories

1 WHAT IS AN INDIAN, and what is a tribe? Elizabeth Homer, an Osage, heads a special office in the Interior Department whose main purpose is to explain “Indian 101” to government officials who deal with tribes, and to resolve disputes when toes are tread upon. She’s a great start for any reporter to begin learning about Indians. Her efforts are part of a larger attempt by tribes to educate lawmakers, opinion setters and the voting public on Indians. The National Congress of American Indians and National Indian Gaming Association, both based in Washington, recently started seminars for Congress members, in hopes that they might learn at least the ABC’s about the people whose futures they affect. Even the Native American Journalists Association has started seminars for mainstream journalists called “Covering Native America From A to Z.”

2 THE REAL WASHINGTON REDSKINS. Much has changed for Indians in Washington since one of my ancestors came to town and danced for Thomas Jefferson in the White House. Who are some of these Indians in Washington today, and what are they doing here? All of the major decisions affecting Indian people are made here, and Indians are involved in every step of the process, a sea change in the history of U.S.-Indian affairs.

The city is full of young, highly educated Indian lawyers who work on the Hill, in Indian-related government agencies, at private law firms. Indians are now their own lobbyists. About a half-dozen tribes have their own representatives in town, including the dean of the Indian diplomatic corps, Charles Blackwell, who calls himself the Chickasaw “ambassador to the United States.” Tribal leaders are constantly flying
American, as it is forcing them to redefine their collective selves by calling into question their once-comforting views of their history and their government.

The change in Indians’ fortunes derives from something uniquely American: the unlikely combination of our worst selves, as demonstrated by our history against the indigenous people, and of our better natures, as reflected in our laws and court rulings that continue to honor the decision of our forefathers to treat Indians as defeated nations. Thus was created the legal concept of Indian tribal sovereignty. This grants tribes powers of self-government and exempts them from the laws and regulations of the states in which their reservations are located.

It is the recent and increasingly bold exercise of tribal sovereignty that is creating stories even more compelling and controversial than Indian stories of the past. Not everyone likes the idea that their grandfathers were stupid enough to allow Indians this unforeseen, future power to redirect the traffic of history across the land that once belonged to them. And it is the growing anxiety of non-Indians that has tribes worried about the outcome of the current struggle for the Indians’ future, as opponents take up arms for a new Indian war in Congress and the courts. Indians could lose, big-time, once again.

Readers travel. They can see the changes in the countryside, and must wonder why the media haven’t noticed. People who probably had never seen Indians before are now gambling in their casinos, shopping in their malls, sleeping in their hotels, sending their kids to their day-care centers and their aging parents to their nursing homes, playing on their golf courses, fishing with their lures, surfing the Web with their Internet providers, eating their pizza, yogurt and buffalo-burgers, wearing their T-shirts, and—if some tribes get their way—putting money in their “off-shore” banks.

Newspaper readers and television viewers are Indians, too, but the media appear blind to them. For years, various Washington Post staff members defended their paltry coverage of Indians with the argument that Washington didn’t have any, they’re all “out there,” beyond the Beltway and the circulation zone, and their actions have little or no impact on Post readers. However, Indians living in Washington say as many as 10,000 to 15,000 Indians in and out of Washington for meetings on the Hill.

Among the influential Indians in the nation’s capital are Keith Harper of the Native American Rights Fund; Rebecca Adamson of the First Nations Development Institute; JoAnn Chase, executive director of the National Congress of American Indians; and Kevin Gover of BIA. Indian organizations here include the National Indian Business Association; American Indian Heritage Foundation; National Indian Education Association; Indian Law Resource Center.

THE NEW INDIAN FIGHTERS. Let’s take a good-and fair-look at the man Indians love to hate, Sen. Slade Gorton of Washington. His critics say he has a vendetta against Indians dating to his days as Washington state attorney general, but he does lead a growing, national anti-Indian movement. Through his position as gatekeeper of the Interior Department’s budget, Gorton has sought to slash government funding for Indian programs by 25 percent; to subject tribes to means-testing for government aid; to force tribes to waive their right of sovereign immunity as a condition for federal funds; and most recently, to force successful casino tribes to share their wealth with poorer tribes. We also should take a look at Indian efforts to defeat him for reelection.

THE NEW CRAZY HORSES. We have new Sitting Bulls and Crazy Horses. They have names like Phillip Martin (Mississippi Choctaw), Ernie Stensgar (Coeur d’Alene, Idaho), Ivan Makil (Salt River Pima-Maricopa, Arizona), Anthony Pico (Viejas Band of Mission Indians, California), Bill Anoatubby (Chickasaws, Oklahoma), Henry Cagey (Lummi, Washington), Debra Doxtator (Wisconsin Oneidas), Ray Halbritter and Keller George (New York Oneidas).

Their jobs require ever increasing levels of sophistication. They have created and run multi-million dollar enterprises; they must negotiate local, state and Washington hurdles; speak the Byzantine language of federal Indian laws and regulations, plus be on constant lookout for legislative threats on the horizon.
Elouise Cobell is a Blackfeet tribal member and banker on the Blackfeet Reservation. She is the lead plaintiff in a historic class-action suit aimed at correcting alleged mismanagement by the federal government of individual Indians’ trust funds.

Photo by James Shipley

THE GROSS INDIAN PRODUCT. What are Indians worth these days to the U.S. economy, in terms of the wealth they produce (including in their casinos), jobs created, taxes generated, goods and services provided, and gifts to their localities?

It has been estimated that the top 10 rich casino tribes donate $100 million a year to their states and localities, for schools, public works and special projects. The former president of the Osage Nation, George Tallchief, is fond of saying that if Oklahoma’s 39 tribes shut down, the state economy would collapse. What would happen if the sovereign immunity or casino plug is pulled? How would it affect states? Some tribes—the Coeur d’Alenes of Idaho, the Oneidas of both New York and Wisconsin—are now their county’s number-one employer. An economically successful tribe creates wealth for non-Indian, taxpaying neighbors as well, because they are the ones Indians hire to fill all the jobs they’re creating.

THE SKY’S THE LIMIT. Some Osages, a corner of whose reservation is adjacent to the Tulsa International Airport, want to declare that their reservation includes the sky above it, to tax the planes that enter the airspace!

It’s just one more harebrained Indian economic development scheme, but the operative word here is “brain.” Indians are trying to come up with ways to manipulate their tribal sovereignty to their economic advantage. The Cherokees launched a Visa card; the Iowas tried to set up an “offshore” bank; the Mississippi Choctaws manufacture car parts for General Motors; other tribes own hotels, operate golf courses, cook pizzas, print T-shirts, own Internet access providers.
may reside in the area, including those parts of the Baltimore area that get the Post. The Baltimore area alone is home to 6,000 Native Americans. Factor in the number of readers who are Indian descendants but not enrolled members of tribes, or whose family lore has led them to believe that they are, and the number of Post readers with some sort of Indian identity could well be in the triple figures.

The fact that the Post hadn’t noticed the Indians in its midst, and suddenly became aware of their presence, is the same phenomenon that is happening all across Indian Country. Indian tribes today are literally changing the face of America.

So true is that statement that almost any tribe today can be used to illustrate the point, but let’s take the Mashantucket Pequots, the Indians the powerhouse East Coast media appear to be most familiar with.

The significance of the Pequots is not that some Little Indians Hit It Big; it is that the Pequots have inexorably altered the state of Connecticut.

What the Pequots did was what tribes all across the country are doing. They manipulated to their advantage combinations of old and recent laws and federal regulations pertaining to Indians. First, the Pequots achieved federal recognition as a nation within the nation, which legitimized the Pequots’ claim of tribal sovereignty. Duly recognized, the Pequots established their casino under federal law. Now the Pequots are using their casino money to diversify and expand. They are buying businesses, becoming one of Connecticut’s largest employers. Some non-Indians have undergone some traumatic social, cultural and legal adjustments, discovering much to their horror that some of their long-assumed rights stopped at the reservation line.

More importantly, to the alarm of their non-Indian neighbors, who have no objections to earning fat Pequot paychecks, the tribe is buying land and seeking to put the land into federal trust, removing it from state jurisdiction.

It is this dynamic that has put tribes in the cross hairs: In a sense, Indians are attempting to buy back their lost land and to regain ancestral homelands from which they were driven long ago.

A band of a tribe long identified as Plains Indians, the Absentee Shawnee, claims Maryland roots and, in effect, has tried to purchase a reservation in the western part of the state.

The day may well come when the Delaware are back in Delaware and New Jersey. And if Indian dreams come true, a tribe may one day prove descendancy from the Doeg Indians and move back to their old long-lost neighborhood, the District of Columbia. Casino across the street from the White House, anyone?

The changing landscape. "There's no pride in the welfare line. Our people know what that feels like. We deserve something better," Coeur d'Alene gaming manager David J. Matheson was quoted as saying in 1995.

Times have changed in Coeur d'Alene, both the city and the tribe. Probably not all that long ago, many non-Indians living there would tell you that they'd never seen one of the 1,500 Coeur d'Alenes, and had never visited the reservation. They can't say that now. The tribe is the county's biggest employer. Its reach into the non-Indian community extends around the world—until Congress shut it down, the tribe operated an Internet gambling site. It has $50 million to $60 million in construction projects underway right now. Its medical clinic Wellness Center, open to the non-Indian public and treating 6,000 to 8,000 non-Indians, already is being called a national model for Indian and rural health care. The tribe is keeping the school system of the nearby city of Plummer afloat with contributions.

Changing Washington landscape. The six state-recognized tribes in Virginia have held together, keeping communities and traditions intact, through more than two centuries, and without the benefit of all the federal Indian programs that benefit federally recognized tribes. Under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988, a tribe may buy off-reservation land and build a casino on it, but it can be put in trust only with the state governor's permission. If the 1,000-member Chickahominy tribe of Virginia were to secure federal recognition, and sweeten the deal for the state of Virginia, they could buy a high-rise in Rosslyn and open a casino. Maybe they'll buy the Redskins.
Mud: covering the story

The other challenges journalists face

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY NELLIE DONEVA

Every spring, the University of Montana School of Journalism offers a class called Native News Honors Project. Teams composed of a reporter and a photographer spend their spring break on a Montana reservation, pursuing two stories. The good stories get published in a special tab and on the J-school website.

The Fort Belknap team from spring '99 has a few pieces of advice for aspiring journalists.

When you get to your first interviewee’s house, scan the horizon for muddy spots. Do NOT drive your car into one of them. It takes two hours and three people to get it out. Get your photographer to help you with the digging early on. Once they get their hands muddy, they’re less likely to take pictures of your predicament (cameras are expensive).

Plan ahead. Call your interviewee and ask if he or she has a tow truck. Make sure AAA will come out there. If not, hope your interviewee will be a really nice person, like Joe Azure, left, and will help you out of a muddy situation. One advantage: you get to ask some questions in a friendly, ice-breaking atmosphere.
"I wanted to cry, but I went in smiling." -- Shannon Dininny

Watch out for wildlife, dead or alive. Framed by antlers perched on an old stump, Shannon contemplates her next move. It turns out to be a flight in a small airplane over part of the reservation. Hint: Have your lunch after, not before you go up in the air.

Make sure you really love your car. You’re going to spend at least half your day in it, zipping from the north to the south end of the rez. When pulled over by a cop, hope he’s after someone else. In our case, the cop was chasing another red car; however, Shannon’s joke to our professors—“Give me your phone numbers in case we end up in jail”—suddenly acquired a different feel.

Keep your best interviewee for last. Kenneth ‘Gus’ Helgeson, also known as Crazy Bear, a relative of Chief Enemy Killer, took us on a scenic cow-feeding trip after the interview. His car, with no seat belts, went up, down and sideways at impossible angles. We survived all that, only to get smoked to near-suffocation later, by five cigarette-puffing interviewees in Helgeson’s house.
Epiphany
Your real goal is not to learn photography, but to learn how to live your life.
– Quatrain 2, The Zen of Photojournalism by Paul Martin Lester (1996)

I t’s hard finding something when you don’t know what you’re looking for. I had been pursuing photojournalism for ten years, but at the end of my formal education I still felt like there was a big hole inside me. I had poked and probed my way into anything which even remotely touched on photography and truthfully, I did learn a lot. But in the end, I still came up empty-handed with the key to it all nowhere in sight.

It was in December of my final year in college when I finally acknowledged what I had been denying. It had been there for some time in plain sight, I was just too cynical to face it.

The thought was this: What I needed to learn about photography had nothing to do with photography. It had everything to do with humanity.

I needed to look outside of photography. I needed to stop thinking about f/stops and The Defining Moment. Those things exist on the surface, I had to go deeper than that.

That was when I stumbled across Paul Martin Lester’s website, The Zen of Photojournalism. Lester had created the page for his students at the California State University in Fullerton as a way to get them to think about what it was they were learning.

If the path of a thousand miles begins with a single step, then it was with his where I took mine. I felt a sense of relief; there were others who felt as I did and were also looking for the same thing. The Zen of Photojournalism served to illuminate me to my successes, misfires, and the traps to be avoided. It told me to stop using my head and to start using my heart.

Objectivity, for me, was the first thing to go. Fairness, however, is an entirely different subject. It doesn’t require you to cut yourself off from the world. There are some who believe we should remain detached and keep our emotions out of our work. They don’t understand, for photojournalists, emotions are our work. How can you know, and therefore report, something you are detached from?

Photojournalism, by necessity, is an experiential occupation. Photographers are on the front lines, they have to be there. Experience then begets understanding.

I used to get a peculiar kind of excitement when covering spot news. I’d charge off, scanner locked into the excitement when covering spot news. I didn’t realize that The Zen of Photojournalism is just an object lesson in teaching us about our own emotions and to control them.

Don’t use photography as an excuse to separate yourself from what you sense. You are what you see and feel. Don’t be afraid to see with feeling.

Quatrain 7, The Zen of Photojournalism.

I stared at it for a while. Occasionally someone would drive up, look at the flower, pause, then leave without saying a word. A realization sunk in and I had a feeling of shame. I had dehumanized this person just so I could feel comfortable taking his picture, probably the last one ever to be made of him.

Where was my humanity? Don’t I have a responsibility to the rest of the world to care? I couldn’t ignore those questions. This man had been someone’s son and maybe someone else’s husband and father. This man had been loved.

My memory pulled me back to when my own uncle died suddenly from a gunshot wound and the raw feelings which followed. Somewhere that night, someone felt swallowed by grief and pain.

And so I did the only thing I could, I began making pictures to honor their loss and which told the real story of what happened that afternoon. Later, when I went home, I cried my eyes out.
My hopes dropped. I could feel the wonderful scene I had glimpsed from the road drifting away with the afternoon breeze and replaced by some cheesy photo. I wanted to say no, but before I did, the advice of one of my favorite teachers welled up from memory.

"Don't be afraid to let the subject guide the picture."

Nervous, I surrendered my trust to serendipity, let go of my idea, and agreed. Richard disappeared into his house, coming back a few minutes later with a small pug.

"This is Cocoa, the Wonder Dog," he said. "We call her the Wonder Dog because we always wonder what she's going to do next."

Richard sat her on his lap, where every now and then Cocoa produced an ominously low growl just in case I had forgotten she didn't like me.

It turned out to be one of my favorite photographs. And it was much better than anything I could have ever come up with.

A good idea is a good idea. It doesn't matter who comes up with it.

The Devil is in the details. A photo editor told me the difference between a good picture and a great one can boil down to the simplest detail. You've got to watch them, he would say, otherwise they'll bite you when you aren't looking.

I had a hard time with that one. I couldn't seem to maintain the effort which I believed that kind of awareness required. But as with a lot of things, beating my head against the wall finally produced the answer I needed. It was simple, I was thinking too much. I needed to forget who I was.

I was doing a picture story on a truck driver named Roger who wanted to be a country western singer. I was starting to drown in my work and I could see myself beginning to fall into visual clichés.

I was showing my work to a friend when he offered a suggestion. He had caught on to something which I had missed but nevertheless could be very significant.

He offered instead of photographing Roger himself, why not shoot the things which suggested his presence? The most obvious thing was his black cowboy hat. It had a unique arrowhead chip on the sweatband over the forehead and in the circles in which Roger moved, it was unlike anyone elses.
Don't be afraid to be a little crazy.
One definition of crazy: distracted with desire or excitement.
Yes, I am crazy.
Quatrain 11, The Zen of Photojournalism

Roger say it for himself. I wasn’t looking, I was still listening to myself and I was missing out.

It’s the little things that can make or break you.

A FEW YEARS AGO I WAS SHOOTING
The Volkslauf charity run in El Toro, California for a local paper. Volkslauf means "People's Race", but for those really familiar with it, the contest was simply called The Mud Run, a six-mile obstacle course through a Marine Corps base's fields, training areas, and drainage ditches. Contestants ran the course in 5-member teams with about 5,000 people competing annually.

The year I covered the race, spring rains earlier in the week had already done quite a number on the course, and the weather wasn't any better on the day of the event. I had full rain gear on with my cameras covered in plastic grocery bags with little holes ripped in them for my lenses to peek through. During the middle of the race, I positioned myself near what was known as the “Rambo Death Ditch”, a 12-foot drainage canal dug from the earth near a tomato fields off-base. Contestants were required to climb down one side, cross, then go up the other.

After the first 300 or so people went through, the grass covering both sides sort of disappeared and the bottom began to fill with dark, muddy soil, reaching mid-thigh in some places.

One of my cameras was about to run out and, taking advantage of a break in the clouds, I pushed the rewind button and began cranking the film back into the cassette. That was when I felt the bottom drop out of my stomach.

The too-quick sound of the film snapping into it’s cassette and the lack of tension on the rewind lever meant only one thing: I had misloaded my film the last time I had changed rolls. Everything I had shot on that camera over the last two hours was gone.

From the outside, I was the soul of coolness, professionally dealing with my gear. Inside, I was throwing a fit worthy of a two-year-old. I berated myself, feeling like a first-class fool and I lamented my lost pictures. I didn’t know what I was going to do.

But when I lifted my head and looked at the scene before me, I guess I had a moment of clarity. I needed to do something really drastic to make up for what was lost. It was time to get crazy.

I carefully reloaded my camera, checking and checking again to make sure the film advanced properly. Looking over once more to the other photographers gathered safely back from the ditch. I smiled, attached a wide-angle lens and leapt from the edge.

It was about a three foot drop and when I landed I sunk up to my knees in mud. My feet made the weirdest sound as I lifted them out, clumsily lurching my way across the canal’s face. Racers clawed their way past me, mud covering every conceivable part of their bodies. At about that time, the light drizzle which had started when I entered the ditch now commenced as a heavy downpour.

Runners, already worn out from slogging through the first half of the race, now dropped their heads in exhaustion as the rain beat on their backs. I sloppily rushed forward, taking advantage of the pause to make a few more frames while they looked up with an expression usually given to the insane.

Eventually I climbed back out and continued shooting, from my previous position. I was invigorated with what I knew more than made up for my lost pictures. Desperation had served me well. Sometimes it’s up to you to shake your own tree.

I don’t think there’ll be any graduation for this part of my education. Don’t believe that I’ve got this thing all figured out. When ever I start to think I do have it all wrapped up, something slaps me down and shows me how much I really don’t know.

I guess my goal is to touch as many people as I can with what I do. Really, it doesn’t matter whether we speak with a camera, a pen, or a bullhorn in the park, just so long as the aim is to bring us together and to understand.

After all, it’s not about journalism, it’s about humanity.

Learning is not an end. It is an endless process.
Quatrain 77, The Zen of Photojournalism.

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Dancing for dollars

Lee Enterprises strengthens its hold on Montana journalism with acquisitions and a close watch on the bottom line

BY BETH WOHLBERG AND ZACH DUNDAS

WHEN IT CAME TIME for Dick Gottlieb, Lee Enterprises' CEO, to sum up 1998 for the managers of the company's various properties, he didn't mince words.

"How in the hell ... how in the HELL ... how in the H-E-L-L ... did we let this happen?" Gottlieb is quoted as saying in the corporation's in-house magazine, leading off his annual "feedback" address, describing a business year he called "the deepest disappointment of my career."

Gottlieb refers to corporate profits that disappointed shareholders and executives alike. Lee Enterprises owns 22 daily newspapers, 15 weeklies and 66 classified, shopper or specialty publications. While the company made money (lots of money, some might say), aggressive new investments—particularly the purchase of an arc of papers in Oregon—ate into the bottom line and didn't return the instant gratification Gottlieb and others in the company expected.

Responding to a disappointing 1998, Lee's boss-of-all-bosses sought to rally the troops in his speech, issuing a stirring corporate call to arms.

"We are ready for a big win," he said. "A big win. A ONE HUNDRED-PERCENT WIN. Prove me right ... and do that. You know I love you. Prove me right... and do that."

What Gottlieb means is, he and the company's upper echelon want all of Lee's disparate properties to "make plan," or achieve pre-set profit goals. While there are undoubtedly numerous corporate strategies for achieving that aim, the most significant is hard to miss. A photo of Gottlieb taken during this speech shows not only the CEO, but also a poster featuring a troupe of dancing pastel figures, a merry group that should be familiar to readers of Lee publications by now.

The little dancing people serve as the logo for Celebrate 2000, the far-reaching millennium project Lee bought whole from the New York Times Company. According to Lee spokesmen, nearly all of the company's newspapers are participating in Celebrate 2000, using the project's packaged story ideas, graphics and marketing angles to mark their communities' voyage into the new century. The project seeks to fuse journalism, history, civic pride and advertising into a single potent dynamo designed to make an impact far beyond the news columns of any given paper.

David Fuselier, publisher of the Missoulian, is quite clear about Celebrate 2000's importance to his paper.

"We've cleared the board for it, and it's going to absorb us for the next two years," Fuselier says. "It's the biggest thing we're doing, and it's possibly the biggest thing we've ever done as a publication."

Indeed, Celebrate 2000 is extraordinarily ambitious. The project's logo is already nearing ubiquity, appearing on local billboards, on the paper's website, on the flagpole outside its office and frequently in its pages. Over the course of Celebrate 2000, the Missoulian will produce 11 special sections. Some will focus on the past, others the future. Fuselier acknowledges that the reporters and editors of the newsroom contribute plenty of time to Celebrate 2000, but...
he quickly makes clear that the stories and special sections the paper carries are only the beginning.

Celebrate 2000, he says, is really a “community envisioning project.” In other words, the Missoulian hopes to inaugurate the brave new century by leading a major development project with city-wide implications. Before that happens, Fuselier says, a series of forums will generate a wide-ranging list of ideas. He says it could be anything from a new convention center to a network of bike trails to an effort to wire all of Missoula with new fiber optics cable. The final choice will be determined by a poll taken after the forums, when Celebrate will have a strong momentum built around its “brand identity.”

“The real question here is, how do we lead in the next millennium? It’s getting increasingly difficult to lead civic projects, even here in Missoula, which is nowhere near as divisive as some of the places I’ve lived.”

That increasing difficulty, Fuselier notes, gives special weight to the influence of the project’s sponsors. Smurfit-Stone, the multinational paper company that runs the Frenchtown mill, insurance giants Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Community Medical Center and The University of Montana are the primary sponsors of Celebrate 2000; television station KPAX joins in as well.

That confluence of advertising, community boosterism and reporting might make journalism traditionalists—and readers who want news served up without a commercial filter—nervous. Fuselier says, however, that escaping the limitations traditionally imposed on newspapers is a key aim of the project.

“This is civic journalism,” he says. “Newspapers, which for so long have been neutral and stand-offish, need to get more active in the effort to find solutions for problems, instead of simply reporting on them. This is something people in the industry have been talking about for the last five or six years, and it seems to pay dividends.”

Dividends, in fact, may be the key to the whole project, as the advertising motive behind Celebrate is overt and comes without apology. Still, Fuselier, a veteran newspaperman who has done tours of duty with papers ranging from the Cincinnati Enquirer to Kalispell’s Daily Interlake, knows what he’s talking about. Civic journalism, sometimes called “community” or “public” journalism, has indeed become a hot topic in a daily newspaper industry constantly fretting about its long-term survival. The general idea is to foster a tighter bond between newspapers and the communities they serve. Some papers have done wonders with civic journalism (the Charlotte Observer in North Carolina was a Pulitzer Prize finalist for an aggressive anti-crime project). Others have been blasted for mellowing into bland, uncritical community cheerleaders.

While it’s too early to judge Celebrate’s journalistic quality and civic impact, Fuselier is very clear on the importance of the project’s marketing facets.

“The brand identity is vitally important, so when we go forward with the final project it has real power and impetus,” Fuselier says. “The forums are designed to get at people’s dreams. There are going to be a thousand ideas. We have really great partners in this project, which will be important once we settle on a final project.”

While Lee’s community project seems as hometown and harmless as apple pie, community members and corporate critics worry that the project’s emphasis is advertising and not solving community problems. These people offer a much greedier view of the company—a company that clusters newspapers, cuts staff and caters to advertisers for optimum cost-benefits.
For readers, that could mean the difference between an in-depth investigative piece and one-time event story. Or an entire section filled with AP news wire stories instead of local news. Or, worse yet, readers may be left in the dark about an issue that could affect their community.

**Expansion mode**

A map of Lee Enterprises’ holdings reveals what many readers around here already know—Lee has a strong collection of newspapers in Montana. Lee’s four major Montana papers, with a combined circulation of 113,500, reach about 64 percent of daily readers in the state. In 1997, the company acquired the Big Fork Eagle, a small weekly on Flathead Lake. The Eagle’s fortuitous location allowed Lee to assemble a mini-group of community weeklies in northwestern Montana when it purchased the Hungry Horse News and Whitefish Pilot from Wyoming’s Sage Publications earlier this year.

In May, Lee Enterprises took control of another newspaper in western Montana—the Ravalli Republic, a 110-year-old newspaper in Hamilton, formerly owned by Pulitzer, Inc. More than two dozen Republic employees lost their jobs in the process.

Lee chose to cease publication of its newspaper, the Bitterroot View, a semi-weekly publication that complemented the Missoulian’s coverage, in order to focus its attention on the Republic, with a daily (Monday-Friday) circulation of about 5,200. "The emphasis will be on local news," says Greg Lakes, the bureau chief of the Bitterroot View who became managing editor of the Republic. "That’s what the Republic has always done and that’s what we will do. The Missoulian is increasingly focused on regional issues and they can’t do the local stuff for us. The Republic fills a real niche here."

Lakes notes that the Lee takeover has benefits. "I was a Missoulian reporter in Ravalli for 12 years and I competed with the Republic," Lakes says. "I was backed by a bigger company with more money to spend—a company that pays better, has graphic artists and good photographers—things that a small paper can’t afford."

Still, there aren’t enough computers to go around and budget controls are tight. But the paper will soon go to color and be printed at the Missoulian.

Lee also has daisy chains of property in Oregon and Wisconsin, in addition to many other holdings across the land. Assembling these regional groups—“clusters,” as they’re called, or “strategic business units”—makes a good deal of logistical sense for a company looking to trim expenses, as company officials acknowledge.

“Lee is doing what other media groups are doing—looking to make the most of regional holdings or regional properties,” says Dan Hayes, director of Lee’s corporate communications. “We want to reduce the behind-the-scenes expenses that don’t have anything to do with serving customers.”

The new group of three weeklies in the Flathead provides an object lesson in the advantages of clustering. The Eagle, far too small to own a press, now prints on Lee’s News press in Columbia Falls. The three papers have combined distribution and advertising efforts, as well.

There’s no doubt that clustering can increase a media syndicate’s profits. But clustered newspapers also have a distinct editorial advantage. Small Lee papers lack the money to send their own reporters to the Legislature in Helena, for example, but they all benefit from the Lee State Bureau, a team of four reporters who cover the House, the Senate and other tentacles of state government. Smaller independently owned newspapers can’t compete economically or editorially with that kind of coverage. For them, news staffs are small, resources are few, and sending a reporter to Helena for 90 days is simply impractical.

But those very facts are what help ensure the success of Lee’s clusters. Seen from a local perspective, there’s little disputing that Lee’s move into the small-town weekly market aids the Missoulian’s efforts to become a regional daily paper. The Garden City daily has long worked to push into the semi-rural hinterlands around Missoula; now the paper’s circulation campaign targets a far-flung range of cities and towns to the north, south and west.

Missoulian publisher David Fuselier is the first to admit that the heart of Missoula is just a small part of his domain.

"Most of our readers now live outside Missoula," Fuselier says. "Oddly enough, Salmon, Idaho, has become one of our best, fastest-growing circulation areas. Libby, Montana, too. One part of it is, Missoula is full. There’s no housing growth in Missoula, really, so we have to go where the growth is. It’s working, too—the
Missoulian’s circulation has grown 6.6 percent in the last year, which has to be one of the best records in the nation.”

Fuselier says that, ideally, a regional daily and community weeklies under the same company should be able to work hand-in-glove. “Lee will also work to come in under that regional umbrella with local reporting in the weekly papers,” he says.

Even as Lee looks for regional synergies (the company has projects in Oregon and Wisconsin comparable to, though not exactly like, the Missoulian’s territorial expansion) some worry their larger papers risk losing the local angle. A reporter in Helena, the logic goes, can’t always write a story that is relevant to four cities hundreds of miles apart, such as Helena, Missoula, Billings and Butte.

This can create a tension that manifests itself in a variety of ways. Jackman Wilson, an associate editor at the Eugene, Oregon Register-Guard, has covered Lee’s expansion in that state. He notes that in one case—an ongoing fusion of the Corvallis Gazette-Times, a long-time Lee property, and the newly purchased Albany Democrat-Herald—two papers that are close geographically but distant editorially have been yoked together, with results that discomfit readers in both cities.

“Historically, Albany and Corvallis have been very different places,” Wilson says. “Albany is a traditional, blue-collar town and Corvallis is a college town, probably a lot like Missoula. They are not inclined to think of themselves as a single community at all, so I don’t know about the wisdom of treating them as such editorially. Speaking as a guy who grew up in Corvallis, it feels awkward.”

Expansion can lead to other problems, not the least of which can be a staffing crunch. “There are times when there are profit pressures,” says former Missoulian publisher John Talbot, “and the major effect is not enough people in the newsroom. There is a constant tension between keeping a newspaper profitable and having enough people to do the job. But that is a criticism we could level at any newspaper, even the New York Times.”
Lee in Montana: From copper collar to gold mine

For more than 30 years, the Anaconda Copper Mining Company owned, controlled and paralyzed much of Montana's print media. From the mid-1920s until 1959, Anaconda owned major newspapers around the state, including the Missoulian, the Helena Independent Record, the Billings Gazette and the Montana Standard.

The copper company's ownership was apparent in every issue of every newspaper. Controversial issues and state and local news hardly ever appeared. Politicians out of favor with Anaconda didn't get covered. Editorial pages suffered with mundane commentary.

Journalists quickly learned that the only way to hold a job in a paper under Anaconda's ownership was to suffocate their news judgments and stifle their voices. Before long, the stranglehold that the mining company had on its reporters, its readers and Montana's media market became known as the "copper collar."

So when a Davenport, Iowa-based corporation purchased the copper company's chain of papers in 1959, a remarkable change swept through the state, one that was apparent on the first day of its control.

A small paragraph on the front page of several Montana papers on June 1, 1959, read, in part: "Each publisher and editor calls the turns as they see them; there is no such thing as dictated editorial policy. We serve only one interest—the public. There are no strings attached to the sale of these papers. Our only obligations are to our subscribers and our communities."

The new ownership, called the Lee Syndicate, said that Montana's papers no longer needed to rely on one corporate entity to call the shots. From then on, they pledged, local and state news would receive the attention it deserved.

And it did. The amount of coverage devoted to Montana's people and issues soared, replacing Anaconda's usual fare of red-baiting columns, anti-labor diatribes and pro-industry bromides. Lee created a state bureau, headquartered in Helena, to cover the Legislature and issues related to state government. Reporters and editors at each paper were encouraged to write about controversial issues.

Lee employees also worked hard to keep the paper profitable. Lee wanted to guarantee financial freedom so that the threat of buy-outs or bribes never loomed close. As their '47 pamphlet put it, "It was this recognition that newspapers not only print the news but must be maintained in a position where, if necessary, they could look any man or corporation or institution in the face and tell that man or corporation or institution to go to hell."

Lee's growing profits promised that Lee's papers wouldn't become financially dependent on mining, timber or other conglomerates. Publishers and editors don't need to fear criticizing these corporations like they did when wearing the "copper collar."

And under this new management, Lee newspapers have flourished. At the time of the sale to Lee, only one paper, the Billings Gazette, was making a profit.

Under Lee, papers have continually remained in the black. Today, the firm owns five of Montana's daily newspapers, three of its weekly papers, and 13 so-called "specialty publications," including its classified circulars and its glossy Montana magazine.

On a national level, Lee Enterprises owns 22 daily newspapers, 15 weeklies, and 66 specialty or classified publications. Almost all of Lee's daily papers and several of its weekly papers have new web sites and, in 1998, Lee newspapers increased their daily and Sunday circulation. That same year, Lee realized a revenue of $517 million, an all-time high.

Lee's holdings in Montana include five dailies and three weeklies with a total circulation of about 134,000, as well as more than a dozen shoppers, an agriculture bi-weekly and Montana magazine.
Nonetheless, it’s a criticism often leveled at Lee newspapers in Montana. No one suggests that Lee reporters perform inadequately; critics merely blame a staff shortage for a dearth of in-depth reporting, follow-up stories and “hard” news, even as the Missoulian, for its part, tries to cover a territory roughly the size of West Virginia.

“We are somewhat short-staffed here,” says Bob McGiffert, professor emeritus at UM, referring to the Missoulian. “I don’t think you can cover city and county government on a daily basis with just one reporter, especially when he’s developing in-depth pieces. I don’t think you can cover schools and the university with one reporter. As a result of being understaffed, they do a lot more puff pieces.”

Deni Elliot, former journalist and director of UM’s Practical Ethics Center, insists that large media owners could in fact be doing exactly the opposite—ensuring that reporters have the resources for in-depth reports and investigative pieces. Elliot, who has worked as a practical ethics counselor in several newsrooms, says that syndicates could actually capitalize on their size and strength, if they so choose.

“Corporate ownership has the potential of allowing for riskier ventures—more emphasis on local news and investigative reports,” she says. “And investigative reports should be allowed to fail because when you start reporting, you don’t know if a story will come out. All these things could happen, but it’s up to the corporate owners and stockholders to say, this is important to us.”

Unfortunately, large media conglomerates have a track record of choosing profits over staff members.

As Lee’s communications officer, Dan Hayes, succinctly puts it, “Family newspapers can decide not to take as much profits as shareholders might want. We can’t.”

And shareholders seem to want more and more profits each year. Lee’s revenue reached an all-time high last year—$517 million—and the company’s profits have increased more than $25 million since 1993.

As Deni Elliot sees it, that drive for the bottom line can often cloud a newspaper’s broader vision—of news as an essential component of a community’s well-being.

“Profit priorities

Lee’s Celebrate 2000 project contains a nugget of concern for the health of its communities, however just like other company-wide projects, Lee forces its community papers into uniformity—all for the sake of a profit, some say.

“What we’ve seen in Lee is the abandonment of the notion that the different papers in the chain are independent,” says Jim Ludwick, a respected, careful business editor for the Missoulian for a dozen years.

“There was a time when we’d hear about the independence of the various newspapers, about how they were autonomous entities within the same company, each one with a free-standing newsroom. There was a lot of pride, in fact, in that concept.”

Ludwick, who moved to the independent Albuquerque Journal last September, logged time at a number of Lee’s Midwestern papers and bureaus before coming to Montana. Now, while he stresses that his reasons for leaving were as much personal as professional, he also evidently has a backlog of thoughts about his former employer. Without much prompting, he talks about Lee and the Missoulian for nearly an hour.

“Then there was a change in leadership at the top of the company, and the old guard that had been running it was replaced by the current leadership, [Lee CEO] Dick Gottlieb and others. The new leaders represented a new generation with a different agenda.”

That agenda, Ludwick suggests, revolves around the bottom line, undermining the ability of reporters and editors to do their jobs, as revenue-driven special projects suck up their time.

“There has become more and more overt pressure to pursue projects that have nothing to do with reader demands and everything to do with generating money,” he says. “You will see a number of special tabloid sections throughout the year, and most if not all of those spring from the knowledge that by publishing a particular section—whether it’s on architecture or new babies or whatever—you’ll be able to

continued on p. 55
Despite hectic days, Emilia tries to find time to give each child individual attention. Here she spends time with Andres, a boy who was brought to the house a year ago because his mother, a prostitute, could not care for him. Below: Emilia’s helping hands administer a dose of vitamins to 8-month old Eduardo. Giving the children extra vitamins is necessary because the home recently ran out of their two-month supply of AZT, a common treatment of HIV that reduces secondary infections and gives patients a better chance for a longer life. A two-month’s supply of AZT costs $1,500.
While music blasts from a near-by radio, Emilia dances with Carmen.

Emilia, one of the Sisters of Mercy, provides a home to HIV-positive children in Honduras

TEXT AND PHOTOS
BY JAMES SHIPLEY

LIKE MANY developing countries in the world, Honduras faces a serious problem containing the spread of HIV/AIDS. Recent studies show that although Honduras comprises only 17 percent of the population in Central America, it has more reported cases of HIV/AIDS than all Central American countries combined. According to the Pan American Health Organization, there is one infectious contact per hour in this impoverished Central American country.

Honduran health officials believe more than 90,000 people carry the virus. Many of them are either unaware or unwilling to come forward in fear of societal prejudices that plague victims. In addition, officials expect 8,000 children to become orphaned in the next three years because their parents died of AIDS related complications.

Both government and non-government organizations are working in Honduras to address the problem and curb the effects of HIV/AIDS. The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, a group of Roman Catholic women who vow to serve the impoverished and sick, is one group making dedicated efforts.

The sisters administer the Heart of Mercy House, a project started in 1997 to meet the growing needs of abandoned and orphaned children, in San Pedro Sula, an industrial center where 40 percent of the country’s HIV/AIDS victims live.

Seventeen children, ranging in ages from several months to 17 years, call the
Mercy House their home. In an attempt to curb the epidemic's alarming growth, the Sisters of Mercy facilitates community educational programs and family support groups.

The home employs three Honduran women who give the children a clean environment to play and learn, healthy food to eat and clean clothes to wear. "These children not only need food to eat and bed to sleep in, they need to be loved, they need to be touched," says Emilia, one of the three women.

Emilia began working at the home in 1997, and it is her compassion, love, and around-the-clock attention she shows the children at the Heart of Mercy House that is the subject of these photographs.

During the kids' afternoon nap, Emilia, too, takes a needed break. This particular day, Ronal, age 1, was not feeling well and needed some extra attention from Emilia.

Emilia and the Sisters of Mercy make sure to bring the kids out into the community where they can interact with other children and adults. Ignorance and a lack of HIV/AIDS education in Honduras have created strong prejudices, which continue to stigmatize those who have the virus.
Covering the Legislature's open party caucuses can be unnerving for both reporters and legislators

BY BETH A. BRITTON

More than 30 pairs of Republican eyes suspiciously glanced in my direction as I crept quietly into Montana's first open caucus last January.

Wishing more than anything to be simply a fly on the wall, I nervously made my way through a sea of suits until I found an empty chair at the back of the room. I plopped down, grabbed my notebook and waited to see what would happen.

To be honest, every legislative reporter—experienced Capitol bureau chiefs, daily reporters and naive students like myself—waited to see what would happen on that first day. After all, the past four years had been spent in a battle to open Montana's party caucuses. Now that the day had finally arrived, no one, including the Senate Republicans surrounding me, knew what to expect.

While reporters were free to pass through the doors of the legislative caucuses at the Montana Capitol this year, things were not always so easy for the media.

The battle to open the meeting doors began back in 1995, when 22 news organizations sued to open up the legislative caucuses, claiming that Montana's open meetings law pertained to all political meetings, including those historically held behind closed doors.

The court had previously ruled that the statutorily required pre-session caucuses were to be open, but at stake in 1995 were the party meetings held during the legislative session.

The closed caucuses violated the public's right to know as guaranteed in the Montana Constitution, argued the news organizations. They also said the caucuses, held in the public-owned Capitol by both the Democrat and Republican parties, were sessions in which strategy and political maneuvering were planned.

Legislators, however, argued the closed-door meetings offered the only time during which they could openly discuss party strategy and get away from the influence of lobbyists and the scrutiny of the media.

In June 1998, after three years of debate, the court ruled that while caucuses are not official meetings of the Legislature, they are indeed part of the process—places where public policy is discussed and strategy is planned.

Although Montana's modern Constitution—including the open meetings law—was adopted in 1972, the debate surrounding open vs. closed caucuses was not an issue until just recently, said former Sen. Bob Brown, R-Whitefish, and 1995 Senate President.

Caucuses were rare when he first arrived in Helena in 1971, Brown said, but through the years the two parties began relying heavily on the closed-door meetings.

"We would never have got to this point if we had just continued to have an occasional caucus," he said. "The public and the press would have understood the need for that, but because it was overused it became misused."

The most important debate of the session was taking place behind closed doors, and the media were justifiably frustrated, Brown said. While he thinks the opening of the meetings is ultimately a good thing, there is a down side.

"There isn't anything dishonest or wrong about it, but sometimes to make up your mind you need to speak frankly and privately to clear the air," he said. "Provided it's not abused, closed caucuses are reasonable."
There are those who claim the opening of party caucuses in 1999 made little difference.

House Minority Leader Emily Swanson, D-Bozeman, said open caucuses are simply a new way of doing business, and that the Legislature is adapting to it. She said it was a healthy change because the public deserves to be part of the process.

Swanson and Senate Majority Whip Fred Thomas, R-Stevensville, both claim that opening the caucuses this year resulted in stronger leadership.

"The result of open caucuses is more open communication in the Senate," Thomas said. "It’s actually made the role of the whips more important. It’s our job to keep members up to date on what’s going on."

But the purpose of caucusing is no longer clear, argued Sen. Vicki Cocchiarella, D-Missoula. In many ways, she said, the role of the party caucus has shifted from being a private strategy session to one resembling an open bulletin board.

"Caucuses used to be a time for us to be together and share our feelings," she said. "But they aren’t that way anymore. They are now informational and sterile."

Caucuses are now no more than glorified press conferences, she said, and Montana’s lawmakers hesitate to speak freely in fear of being quoted in the morning papers.

"I don’t think anyone’s benefitted," Cocchiarella said. "The press isn’t getting what they wanted, which was the nitty-gritty ground level of how we create strategy."

The media were not under the illusion that opening the meetings would drastical-
Environmental journalists need to ignore the fear of bias and then provide new answers to problems they cover

By Michael Frome

One day in class a student, Heather, raised her hand to speak. Her eyes were bright with a revelation. “There is a difference,” she announced, “between covering the environment and environmental journalism.”

Heather was absolutely correct. Environmental journalism requires learning more than “how to write,” but learning the power of emotion and imagery, to think not simply of Who, What, Where, When and How, but to think Whole, with breadth, depth, perspective and feeling.

This is not the way it works in mainstream or conventional journalism, which continues to suffer under the illusion and delusion that “objectivity” actually prevails in newspapers, radio and television and that journalists must set aside personal feeling for their subjects or get out.

“There is no dispassionate objectivity,” wrote Saul Alinsky in Rules for Radicals. That has been said and shown in a thousand different ways. Business news is almost always interpreted from the business viewpoint. So are sports, food, automotive, aviation, travel and real estate news. Public relations, the spin doctors working for powerful corporate and government interests, constitute a preeminent influence on how news is covered and presented. But then the media themselves are corporate, driven far more by profit than public service.

Commercial television is probably worst of all, mind numbing, dumbing down America, fostering the gospel of an overconsumptive, wasteful age. Nevertheless, advocacy is a word journalists have been taught to avoid, presumably because it marks a bias, something that should not be acknowledged. But we ought to be advocates for the health and safety of the planet, concerned with global warming, acid rain, destruction of tropical and temperate forests, toxic wastes, pollution of air and water, and population pressures that degrade the quality of life.

Moreover, the world we live in is divided between those who do not have enough and those who have more than enough. It grieves me that the United States should lead in widening the gap between the underprivileged—the homeless, hungry and hopeless—and the overprivileged who want still more. Clearly it is time to ask for new and better answers.

That is what journalism is meant to do. The late I.F. Stone said he wanted only to live up to his “idealized image of what a true newspaperman should be.” I’ve always felt the same way while taking my share of lumps.

Thus I could empathize with Stone, who followed a lonely road in Washington while publishing his investigative and political newsletter. In 1941 he was expelled from the National Press Club for bringing a black judge as his lunch guest. He was hounded by the FBI, excoriated on the floor of Congress, and scorned by colleagues of the media. When he closed shop in December 1971, Stone wrote:

“The place to be is where the odds are against you; power breeds injustice, and to defend the underdog against the triumphant is more exhilarating than to curry favor and move safely with the mob. Philosophically I believe a man’s life reduces itself ultimately to a faith—the fundamental is beyond proof—and that faith is a matter of aesthetics, a sense of beauty and harmony. I think every man is his own Pygmalion, and spends his life fashioning himself. And in fashioning himself, for good or evil, he fashions the human race and its future.”

Michael Frome, Ph.D., the author of Green Ink - An Introduction to Environmental Journalism, has taught environmental journalism at the universities of Idaho and Vermont and Western Washington University. Over the years he has served as a featured columnist in Field & Stream, Los Angeles Times, Western Outdoors and American Forests. He has written four other books.
The Zortman-Landusky mine wiped out thousands of trees and devastated hundreds of miles of wildlife habitat and streams and rivers. The state is currently working on a reclamation project.

Pursuing the concept of faith and aesthetics, of beauty and harmony, coupled with the essential element of ethics, is fundamental to a fulfilling career.

Albert Schweitzer taught that a person is ethical when life becomes sacred, not simply his or her own life, but that of all humans, and of plants and animals, and when he or she devotes himself or herself to other living things. That commitment is implicit in environmental journalism.

Schweitzer followed the creed of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who insisted that “literature, poetry and science are all homage of man to the unfathomed secrets of nature,” that all things are friendly and sacred, all days holy, all beings divine, and that every animal in its growth teaches unity of cause.

And Thomas Merton wrote that he discovered new perceptions of ethics once he was free of a society falsely happy because it felt protected by military might, a society imaged in the mass media, advertising, movies, television, and best sellers, “pompous and trifling masks that hide hypocrisy, cruelty and fear.”

Rachel Carson wanted to tell the story of pesticides through one magazine or another, but none would have it. Once she published Silent Spring, most of the media ridiculed it, parroting chemical industry propaganda. Ultimately she reviewed and defined her goal:

“The beauty of the living world I was trying to save has always been uppermost in my mind—that, and anger at the senseless brutal things that were being done. I have felt bound by a solemn obligation to do what I could—if I didn’t at least try I could never again be happy in nature.”

For myself, I see imagination and a subjective value system as a force empowering the individual who cares and desires to rise above sheer facts, which may not be so factual after all. To say it another way, the source of strength in human life is in emotion, reverence and passion, for the earth and its human web of life. I didn’t think this up. It’s an old, ancient idea.

But modern society is obsessed with facts and figures, with modern machinery providing access to even more numbers. Alas, the analytical type of thinking of western civilization has given us the power over nature yet smothered us in ignorance about ourselves as part of it.

In other words, individuals succeed when they rise above themselves, and above institutions, to challenge an entrenched system in which a small minority controls wealth and power. There must be serious commitment, risk-taking, personal self-sacrifice. Most of those willing to sacrifice never do it for salaries; yet crusades for social issues, whether for peace, racial equality, gender rights, or the environment, show how people—at times a very few—can and do bring needed change. The effort itself is rewarding, more than any success the effort may bring.

I recognize that mine is not the most popular or accepted approach—and definitely not in the ranks of the Society of
Environmental Journalists. The SEJ presumes to “advance public understanding of environmental issues by improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental reporting,” but is influenced largely by mainstream, tradition-bound reporters. In an article in the media watchdog magazine, EXTRA! (January-February 1997), “Saving the Earth Isn’t Their Job: Rachel Carson Wouldn’t Recognize Many Environmental Journalists Today,” Karl Grossman wrote that much of the SEJ “has a problem with investigative journalism—or anything else that could be labeled ‘advocacy.’”

Grossman related his experience of attending a conference to consider the organization’s future direction. Noel Grove, editor of the SEJournal, asked conference attendees about printing on 100 percent recycled paper. “That would be advocacy!” came a chorus in reply.” Grove got the message: A note in the Fall 1998 SEJournal announced that “the former Green Beat,” a section designed as an idea exchange for environmental journalists and editors—“has been changed to The Beat to avoid any appearance of bias in the SEJournal.”

At times, now and then, mainstream journalists are allowed to demonstrate their bias and to do wonderful work. Dick Smith joined the staff of the Santa Barbara News Press in 1948 and made the backcountry of the Los Padres National Forest his special beat, roaming the trails and canyons with camera and notebook. He was the untiring guardian of wilderness, “the conscience of the county.” He studied the California condor and helped gain recognition of it as a species in need of special protection. Smith sparked the effort to designate the San Rafael Wilderness, the first one reviewed by Congress and set aside under the 1964 Wilderness Act, and wanted a large adjacent area added to it. When he died suddenly in 1977, the mayor proclaimed Dick Smith Week and the whole city mourned. All kinds of groups and officials supported the wilderness extension, which became the Dick Smith Wilderness.

This country and the world need more Dick Smiths to stir the public conscience with diligent research, reporting and writing on critical environmental issues. An article about the humongous Three Gorges Dam in China by Wu Mei in the Winter 1999 issue of the Media Studies Journal reveals that from 1984 to 1989, when the megaproject was hotly debated in the inner circle of the Chinese government and engineering consortiums, when government agencies in both the United States and Canada were either seeking contracts or providing feasibility studies, American coverage of the megadam was superficial. The Three Gorges dam was never a big “story” in major newspapers.

Well, it ought to be a big story. Whether it’s the Three Gorges in China or the environmental challenges in our own communities, the big stories will be when journalists and their editors courageously and shamelessly show that they care about humanity and the earth.

Mark Alan Wilson

Mountain biker rides through logged area of Flathead National Forest
SEJ responds to Frome

BY SEJ PRESIDENT MICHAEL MANSUR

I appreciate Michael Frome’s passion for environmental journalism and I agree that there actually is no such thing as dispassionate objectivity. Who could be so naive to think that reporters don’t deeply feel a wide range of emotions as they cover their stories and that, in some ways, those emotions color their work?

But I must say I’m extremely disappointed that Frome has neglected an even more basic principle of journalism: Be fair and be complete.

Frome neglected to contact those he criticizes. No one in the Society of Environmental Journalists, including Executive Director Beth Parke, Noel Grove, the SEJournal editor, has heard from Frome.

If I can’t be objective, I learned early on that the only way to have any credibility was to be fair. That meant that if I was going to put the mayor on Page One in an article critical of him or his administration, I damn well better talk to him about it. I’ve also learned that such conversations are quite illuminating. Often they just sink the subject further; sometimes, they explain away some criticism.

In this case, Frome might have learned—if he had bothered to ask—that the comment made to Noel Grove about using recycled paper was a joking remark made by a member. The reporter was poking fun at the sensitivities that some environmental reporters feel about being branded in their newsrooms as “tree-huggers.”

Frome might have also learned that this debate over advocacy has been with SEJ since its inception. We have members today who agree with Grossman, a member, and Frome that environmental journalists should be more advocates than traditionally objective reporters.

We think this is a healthy debate. And we don’t judge our members by their works or try to divine whether this story or that smacks too much of advocacy. Our members are prohibited from doing public relations on environmental issues.

And I should add that our SEJ ranks include a number of Pulitzer, Polk, SPJ, Dupont, and Meeman award winners whose works achieved exactly what Frome advocates. They pointed out great wrongs and sought to cure them. We encourage such investigative reporting and take great pride in our tradition of practicing it.

What’s more, we see our mission as helping as many other working journalists in America—whether they be in Frome’s estimate “traditional” or an “advocate”—to produce more fine investigative and daily journalism.

And, oh yes, Rachel Carson would be welcome as a member. As a book author she would qualify. In 1996 and 1998, SEJ members at our national conferences gave standing ovations to “A Sense of Wonder,” a one woman play based on the life and work of Rachel Carson.

from Frome.

The scenic Bitterroot Valley is Montana’s fastest growing area. And now its 110-year-old daily newspaper has entered a new growth stage of its own. In May, the Republic joined Lee Enterprises and took on a new set of goals.

THEY ARE ALL ABOUT GROWTH.

What a great place to go to school!
Not a Capitol crime...

but working in the state’s capital makes many reporters wary of potential conflicts of interest

By Kathleen McLaughlin

If Montana is one, big small town, its capital of Helena is a little, tiny suburb, where a closeness and familiarity among people can make for some interesting quandaries in reporting.

It’s difficult, if not impossible, to cover Montana government and politics for any length of time without running into someone you know from outside of work. The same can be said of journalism all over Montana, but the capital is infested with potential conflicts of interest. As a result, the journalists who report on statewide issues are perhaps even a little more concerned about boundaries than is typical.

Consider Mike Dennison. The Capitol bureau chief for the Great Falls Tribune since late 1992, Dennison is also a father of two with numerous ties to the Helena community.

Dennison is married to former Tribune Capitol reporter Sue O’Connell, who now works in the press office for Attorney General Joe Mazurek. One of their sons is on a soccer team with the son of State Auditor Mark O’Keefe, and Dennison was a Cub Scout troop leader with Secretary of State Mike Cooney. His family attends the same church as several state legislators.

But he doesn’t shy away from doing stories critical of these elected officials. Rather, Dennison says, personally knowing the people he covers probably makes him a better journalist. Reporters who cover the Legislature and other parts of state government know they better have their facts nestled down on controversial stories.

“I don’t know if we’re more careful about the stories I do, but I think we’re really conscientious about how we write affects the people we cover,” Dennison says of the Capitol press corps. “We’re not just going to go out and do a hatchet job.”

Dennison agrees that the oddities of Montana Capitol reporting can be frustrating. He and his wife have agreed that she won’t give him tips from the attorney general’s office. So even though he has access to the most inside information, Dennison is kept in the dark so nobody can accuse O’Connell of favoritism.

Other reporters, past and present, who grew up in Montana and then went on to cover Helena, say the situations are at times amusing. In my case, Rep. Dan Harrington, D-Butte, was my driving instructor in high school, while Sen. J.D. Lynch, D-Butte, was the altar boy at my parents’ wedding. Hardly a month goes by in which I don’t interview someone who went to school with one of my parents or siblings.

My sister is personnel director for a state agency, my fiancee is an active environment-
Reporters from different Montana media gather to cover the day-to-day activities of the 1999 Legislature.

George Lane, Helena Independent-Record

Journalists and my father is former manager of a proposed gold mine near Yellowstone National Park. You can guess which issues I steer clear of covering.

Kevin McRae was a reporter for two-and-a-half years with the Lee Enterprises State Bureau. McRae, who grew up in Kalispell, says he found it funny that after journalism school at the University of Montana and working hard to get a position in the Capitol press, he ran into so many people who knew his family and were more interested in talking about his dad than admiring his own achievements.

Coming to Helena as a young journalist with the hope of a social life is tough, McRae says.

“I always thought it was maybe a function of Helena—it being the state capital and a government town—that a lot of people of similar age groups and demographic characteristics are brought here and melded,” says McRae, now a labor relations specialist with the state. “The minute you decide you are going to have a personal life in this town, you have to acknowledge there are going to be some perceptions about conflicts.”

In the interest of avoiding such perceptions, I should tell you now, McRae is my brother-in-law. See what I mean about small town? But the conflicts can span all types of media—not the newspaper contingent.

KUFM radio reporter Truxton Rolfe has to contend with a much more direct potential conflict of interest in his first session covering the Legislature. His uncle, Stan Fisher, is a freshman member of the state House. Rolfe steers clear of his uncle as a source, just to make sure there’s no perception of favoritism.


Rolfe grew up around politics, with his mother and father very active in the state Republican Party. His dad, Tom Rolfe, was a representative from Bozeman in the early 1970s, whose main claim to fame is sponsorship of the $5 state highway speeding ticket. His mother, Judy Rolfe, is a party insider who works for the Legislature.

“I have this role at the Legislature that’s not a typical Rolfe role,” he says. “I’m not leaning toward the right, but walking right down the middle.”

Admittedly, not everyone is so careful. Reporters here have been known to step across the obvious ethical boundaries between sources and journalists. While not mimicking the Washington press corps by attending regular social functions with the people they cover, some reporters occasionally fall into the party trap during the Legislature. One television reporter, new to covering the Legislature, had a state senator over for dinner this session.

But for the few missteps, most Capitol reporters take conflicts of interest very seriously, even if they can’t always outrun the perception.
The only judges we were trying to impress were our readers.

The Spokesman-Review recently captured numerous top honors at the Inland Northwest Excellence in Journalism Competition. It seems that trying to earn a reputation with you has given us one with our peers. Of course, we are proud of these honors. However, we're prouder still of our staff's continuing commitment to our readers. It guarantees the most comprehensive and balanced news coverage available, which is what makes us a winner in your eyes.

The Spokesman-Review

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Through a wolf’s eye

On-line photojournalism magazines offer a whole new world of photography

BY NELLIE DONEVA

As a wolf floats in near silence from tree to tree as it observes its prey, so does the photographer when he is on assignment.

Wolves and photojournalists? They are very similar, says Mike Tripp, the founder of the web magazine, The Wolfseye, born in January, 1999.

The Internet, the ever-hungry voracious virtual reality monster, has swallowed another morsel, an on-line photojournalism magazine.

The Wolfseye aims to fill a niche in cyberspace, building a community of photojournalists and offering features that a paper magazine would be unable to provide.

Most of the web photojournalism magazines that we see today have been created within the past two years: Behind the Viewfinder, the Digital Journalist, the Untitled Magazine. None of them has a paper version.

"'Wolfseye' has always seemed, to me at least, a really silly name for a photographic web site," James Colburn wrote to the NPPA-L, a photojournalism discussion list, sponsored by the National Press Photography Association.

"Photographers are like the wolves in the wild whose presence slips silently into the background," wrote Tripp in defense of his choice of the wolf as a symbol.

To other viewers the connection was obvious.

"The name made perfect sense to me," wrote photojournalist Peggy Bair. "These are strong, stealthy creatures with magnificently eyes. They look like they could see right through you."

The Wolfseye has received more than 100 visits per day to its site. It has received many letters of support, "but only a few have given the time to become involved or to help," said Tripp, the site coordinator.

Nevertheless, in its fourth month, the Wolfseye is undergoing intense transformation as a result of the viewers' feedback. The initial Star Trek cover page is gone. New features have been added. The "Ultimate Bulletin Board" gives viewers the chance to contribute to the site’s improvement.

You are encouraged to continue to visit regularly and offer us advice and your comments as you are able. This site is not about us...it is about you," wrote Tripp to the NPPA discussion list.

The number one requirement of every journalist is that he or she can meet deadlines. If you don't submit your article or photos on time, the editors cannot edit on time, the designers cannot lay out the paper or magazine on time, the press cannot print it on time and then the publisher is unhappy with everyone.

In the world of the virtual magazine, it is a different story.

The whole process with the printing is eliminated. All you have to do is download the pictures and the words and there they are, ready for the whole world to view.

You don’t have to put out a different issue every day or every week. You can
download things as you get them.

The Wolfseye, Behind the Viewfinder and the Digital Journalist have mailing lists, which inform subscribers through e-mail of any new items added to the site.

Since the space that Internet offers is unlimited, web magazines can afford to expand their current issue as much as they want. Index pages with links make navigation within the magazine easier. Past issues can also stay on-line, virtually, forever.

"Untitled Magazine was created in response to the rapidly shrinking space in newspapers and magazines across the world," wrote the magazine’s editor, Patrick Witty. "The Internet is the future of communication and expression."

Audience is also unlimited. All you need is a computer with Internet connection. You can be anywhere in the world.

"I will visit this place daily to see your work," Satish Nandgaonkar wrote to Behind the Viewfinder. Nandgaonkar is a city correspondent with the Bombay Times in India and wants to learn photography. "I would like to make friends with you and write to you. There is so much we can share."

Web magazines can also offer more photos than paper ones.

The on-line version of Life magazine has a “picture of the day” category, a “this day in Life” category, which shows Life’s front page of the same day 70 years ago, and a “photo week in review,” which shows world news from the past week.

Untitled Magazine publishes only photo stories and essays. All of them are in-depth documentaries, including stories about Jordan’s mourning of the death of King Hussein, an election day in Chile and the life of prisoners in Limestone, Alabama.

Another feature web magazines offer is photo competitions. The Wolfseye has a bi-weekly contest, where pictures are submitted through e-mail and all winning entries are displayed in the photo gallery on the site.

If you prefer the picture of an elderly couple hugging by an ancient gramophone to the one of a girl smiling on a California beach, you can e-mail your opinion to the Wolfseye contest judging site. You can congratulate the contest winners and you can vote for the People’s Choice Award.

One unique feature of web magazines is the opportunity for all viewers to publish their feedback directly and unedited in the magazine. The discussion forum is updated as soon as the viewers submit their entries. They can say anything they want, on any topic they want. It doesn’t cost money for paper or ink. Other viewers can respond to comments.

Web magazines offer not only the usual columns, technical advice, articles on new digital cameras or information regarding Nikon’s compatibility with the Y2K bug. Behind the Viewfinder has started something new—photojournalists’ journal entries. The viewer is able to see the pictures and read what was involved in the taking of these pictures, how the photojournalist felt, what he or she thought about, what problems they had.

Technology also allows us to actually hear what the photographer has to say. One can listen to Mary Ellen Mark’s voice while looking at her pictures on the Digital Journalist’s site. She will tell you how she started out as a photographer 30 years ago, explain how she looks for images that will last forever, and give you advice on how to edit your own work.

Some web magazines, like Behind the Viewfinder, have a standing profile page with pictures of the photojournalists that contributed to the magazine. We can see where these people studied and where they’ve worked. We can find out that freelancer James Keivom’s life has changed since he picked up a point-and-shoot camera more than 126,144,000 seconds ago. We learn that he follows the Japanese saying “Fall seven times, stand up eight.”

This gives the viewer a sense of proximity to the photojournalists. We see their work, we know who they are. "They are the observers, the watchers, the teachers," wrote Tripp, speaking of the Native Americans’ beliefs about wolves. Perhaps we can say the same of photojournalists. Perhaps their eyes, just as the eyes of the wolf “can see to the heart of a moment and into the very soul of the individual."
It ain’t your father’s copy desk

Copy editing and fact checking take a back seat to computer pagination and technical expertise

BY DAVID CRISP

COPY EDITING HAS BEEN COMPARED to tending goal in ice hockey. Every time you make a mistake, a red light goes off and people start yelling at you.

But at least goalies get plenty of exercise, extra padding, masks to hide behind and cheers when they make a good save. Copy editors? On a good day, they get change from the vending machine.

The copy desk always has been the least glamorous of newsroom addresses, the last refuge of burned-out reporters whose legs have gone or who celebrated too many deadlines at the corner tavern. It’s where Murphy, Schwartz, McHugh and Kruger ended their days in “The Front Page,” the most affectionate—and cynical—of newspaper tales.

A 1989 survey taken by the American Society of Newspaper Editors labeled the copy desk the “Mount Everest of discontent” in American newsrooms. That and other surveys have found copy editors the most susceptible of newsroom employees to burnout and the employees least likely to choose journalism again as a career.

Despite all that, the copy editor’s job has become more critical than ever. If reporters are the ears of the newsroom and photographers its eyes, then copy editors are its conscience. A good desk is both vigilant and picky, the heart of a newspaper’s institutional memory and of its dedication to craft, detail and accuracy.

A good copy editor knows when to put an apostrophe in “its,” how many “m’s” belong in “accommodate” and whether Evergreen is an avenue, a street, a terrace or a town. He knows the name of the police chief and how to spell it; he knows who was secretary of state under Ronald Reagan; he knows who conquered England in the 11th century; he knows the difference between restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses.

With experience, good editors learn which reporters always write six inches more than they promised, which words they spell wrong, and what to guard against when a reporter’s having a bad day. They learn how to tear a story apart without tearing the reporter apart. Maybe nobody else knows when copy editors do things right, but they know. They always know.

But the job has changed, in dramatic ways. Since 1960, computers have cut the workforce in newspaper back shops by up to half, by some estimates. Where did that work go? To the copy desk.

At the same time, newspapers began emphasizing color and design, filling their pages with breakout boxes, graphics, sidebars and refers. Where did that work go? To the copy desk.

Less obvious changes also have added to the copy editor’s burden. Obituaries at major Montana dailies are now paid advertisements, but the job of proofreading that copy has usually remained in the newsroom. Who does the work? The copy desk, of course.

News releases that reporters used to rewrite into some semblance of newspaper style now are often scanned directly into the computer. Who has to make them printable? You guessed it.

At many newspapers, editing copy is the least of the copy editors’ jobs. They have to troubleshoot computer problems, download weather maps and stock pages, design graphics, adjust the color, lay out pages and tend the web site. In most cases, staffing hasn’t kept pace with the new demands.

“There’s more work—more sophisticated work—fewer people and not enough time,” says Tad Brooks, the news editor.
who rides herd on a seven-person desk at the Missoulian (an eighth position is vacant).

Even with all the new duties, Brooks says he has moved as many as 14 pages through the window on a single shift. Another editor on the staff has moved 16 pages. This writer’s single-shift record, including remakes for each of three editions of The Billings Gazette, was 22 pages.

Clearly, editors working at that pace aren’t spending much time editing copy. But the problems run deeper than that, says The Gazette’s Jim Oset. Copy editing has suffered from a cultural upheaval that emphasizes visual splash at the expense of craftsmanship, he maintains.

"Paying attention to detail went out the window," he says. "It happened in the school system; it happened in every facet of society."

After 27 years at The Gazette, even Oset’s title is an anachronism. He may be the only copy desk chief with that title in Montana. Unlike Brooks, who relishes the opportunity to get his hands on every aspect of the newspaper, Oset has resisted the move to computer pagination. His work ethic, forged in a stint on the desk of the Milwaukee Journal, aims squarely at making copy better.

It’s a task that has become increasingly difficult, says Gary Mose-man, managing editor of the Great Falls Tribune.

"I have long lamented that new systems have come a little bit, actually a fair amount, at the expense of good editing," he says.

The Trib has attempted to adjust by assigning editors specifically to reading stories, as well as shifting more copy reading to the city desk editors.

The daily has even reinstated, after a fash-
only half-jokingly. “We have those techcians over there.”

At the Missoulian, every story gets in theory at least three reads: one by the city desk, one by a copy editor and one by the editor who designs the page where that story will appear. In reality, at least one of those steps often is skipped, and editors struggle to find time to work one-on-one with reporters, Brooks says.

The same is true at The Gazette, where working with reporters used to be the job of the region desk, that wide-ranging daily’s equivalent of the city desk. When the paper adopted pagination, page-designing duties were dumped on the region desk. Despite several reorganizations since then, the desk has never quite recovered. The demands became so difficult that three region editors in a row (including this one) asked for and received transfers to reporting jobs, despite a two-step cut in the pay scale.

At the Chronicle, City Editor Vestal gives the first read to most local stories. In a perfect world, he said, every story would get two pure reads from two sets of eyes, as well as once-over from the page designer. But the world isn’t perfect.

“City editor is a constant struggle,” he says. “It has been everywhere I go. I always feel like we’re pretty short.”

The composing room used to provide a backstop for overworked editors. Readers angry about an error still often ask, “Don’t you have a proofreader?” The answer, in most cases, is no: Proofreaders have gone the way of copy boys and linotype operators.

At the Missoulian, the backshop boss supervised five people as recently as five years ago. Now he’s down to one. At the Chronicle, pages go straight from the computers to negative. The Gazette prints out half-size proofs of its pages before sending them directly to plate.

The extra pressure on the copy desk seems to hit newspapers most where it hurts worst—in the eyes of readers. Newspapers’ preoccupation with design, usually traced to the influence of USA Today, hasn’t done much to improve stagnating circulation. My own biases may be showing, but in 18 years in this business, I have yet to hear a reader complain about widows, bumping heads or trapped white space. Overwhelmingly, what moves readers enough to write or call in a complaint are errors, omissions or perceived bias in the copy itself.

They don’t have to look far. According to a survey released in December by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 73 percent of readers are more skeptical about newspaper accuracy than they used to be. To editors, errors are regrettable but inescapable.

“Every time I make one I die a thou­sand deaths,” Oset says. “Nobody has to chew me out.”

Nathaniel Blumberg, the former dean of the Montana School of Journalism, fills pages of his occasional newspaper critique, the Treasure State Review, with blunders extracted from Montana dailies. The Missoulian is a favorite target, but other dailies also take their lumps. In his last issue, Blumberg reproduced a weather map from the Great Falls Tribune that had placed Lewistown in the far northwest
corner of the state and Havre squarely between Bozeman and Missoula.

Blumberg never blames the copy desks for these errors. Instead, he criticizes the corporate owners of Montana newspapers, particularly Gannett and Iowa-based Lee Enterprises. A typical blast: “The Missoulian’s misdeeds [in primary election coverage] were a logical result of egregious understaffing of its newsrooms by the Iowa corporation, which expects its hassled reporters and harried editors to do far too much.”

While the editors I talked to were proud of their jobs, they agreed that the workload can be frustrating. The corporate culture, with its emphasis on generating profits for stockholders, can add to the problems.

“I think every craft and discipline and job has suffered because of that,” says Oset. “But how do you stop it?”

Brooks was equally pragmatic about the pressure to produce more with less.

“In a corporate environment, where the demand for profits is 10 percent above the 10 percent you made the year before, it’s just a reality,” he says.

One bright side, at least for aspiring copy editors, is that their skills are more in demand, and not just at newspapers. The proliferation of new media has opened new doors for those who have the right combination of language and design skills.

“You can no longer be just a word-smith,” Brooks says. “You have to be that and much more.”

Even though most newspapers now pay beginning copy editors higher wages than beginning reporters, the jobs are getting harder to fill. Oset says that The Gazette is lucky to get 10 applications to fill a copy-editing position. The Missoulian, with its pipeline to the university and its cultural appeal, draws more applicants, but many either lack the technical skills or expect more money than the paper can pay, Brooks says.

Filling copy editor positions always has been tough, says the Trib’s Moseman.

“They’re bad hours,” he says. “There’s no ego involved in copy editing, at least not ego gratification.” The technical skills that have been added have just made hiring editors harder, he says.

“It used to be the copy desk was where the old reporters went to die,” Brooks says. “But we can’t do that anymore.”

Frustrations at The Gazette, Missoulian and Tribune have been heightened by recent changes in computer systems. Editors at all three papers reported having to work through massive retraining, as well as dealing with frequent computer crashes on deadline.

“There are times when it can be very aggravating and frustrating,” Brooks says. Then he chuckles and adds, “Quite a lot, actually.”

Montana newspapers have attempted to make copy-editing jobs more appealing in a variety of ways, such as flexible schedules, including four-day work weeks; with pay differentials for editors or for night-shift workers; with added training and in-house critiques that point out great saves by the copy desk; or by adopting team approaches that place editors in closer contact with reporters earlier in the story process.

At the Chronicle, Vestal tries to work with reporters as closely as possible. At his best, he says, he has given reporters a weekly sheet on writing.

“It’s something I’m a big believer in but something I don’t do enough,” he says.

Despite the frustrations, editors at Montana’s major dailies say they like their jobs. “You get to travel around the world from your desk,” Brooks says.

When Vestal left the desk to return to reporting for a time, he found that he still wanted a role in shaping the daily paper.

“I missed being the person saying, ‘OK, this is what we’re going to do,’” he says.

At The Gazette, Oset sees things gradually improving, especially with the decision to replace a departed managing editor with a designer and a copy editor.

“I think The Gazette has realized how important it is for newspapers to be as error-free as possible,” he says. After all his years on the desk, he still finds copy editing an exacting discipline that requires editors to concentrate all their faculties at once.

“At heart, I’m always looking up, hoping,” he says.
When Gannett swallowed The New Mexican, it didn’t reckon on a foxy old publisher named Robert McKinney

By Rob Dean

The march of national companies that gobble up local businesses didn’t begin or end in Santa Fe, but the reality hit home in 1976, when the largest newspaper chain in America bought The New Mexican from Robert M. McKinney. The rise of corporate ownership and decline of independent newspapers had been accelerating steadily since the end of World War II. So when the addition of The New Mexican made Gannett’s 51 papers strong and growing, it looked like a deal that would last.

End of story—or so it seemed.

But for Santa Fe, a commercial and cultural intersection for almost 400 years, and for The New Mexican, the newspaper that had covered the town since 1849, the Gannett takeover was just the beginning of another colorful chapter.

Over the next 13 years, powerful men quarreled over control of a business, and lawyers in fancy suits fought it out in court. The prize was none other than the oldest paper in the West.

By 1989, The New Mexican was back in the hands of McKinney and his daughter, Robin McKinney Martin. How the paper bounced from local ownership to corporate control and back is a story about power and wealth but also about the relationship of a newspaper to its community.

This year, a decade later and in its 150th year of operation, the paper is a study in the differences between independent and
corporate ownership. The words of two owners still resonate with the dueling convictions that breathe real life into the debate over local versus chain.

In reclaiming his paper, McKinney, who turned 79 the year he got The New Mexican back, made a promise that if it returned to his control, the newspaper would expand news coverage, increase circulation, slow the rate of staff turnover and hire employees who called Santa Fe home.

Those stated goals stood in sharp contrast to bottom-line goals.

"We regard Santa Fe and New Mexico, in general, as among the most promising growth areas in the country," Gannett president Al Neuharth said on the day his company bought the paper.

Ask former New Mexican staffer Inez Russell about the difference between the paper under Gannett and McKinney, and she will tell you things have changed for the better.

"The main difference was that we never had adequate staffing in the Gannett days," she said. A native of Northern New Mexico, Russell was a reporter under Gannett in the 1980s, went away and returned to The New Mexican as a senior editor in the 1990s. She now is editor of The Taos News, a sister publication of The New Mexican.

Six reporters in 1987 compares to 13 now, Russell said. There used to be three sports reporters; today there are four. Two people worked on the arts and entertainment magazine. Today, as the magazine has grown, the staff has increased to seven. One reporter then covered state government and politics for the Capitol City daily. Two reporters now are assigned to the Capitol, and a third helped with the 1998 statewide election and the 1999 legislative session.

Overall, The New Mexican of today employs more people, covers more news, circulated more copies and sells more advertising. In 1987, the paper employed about 130 people; today the number is about 200. As a measure of news and advertising, the size of a typical Sunday edition in 1987 was 60 pages in five sections. The edition on the same Sunday in 1999 was 108 pages in 11 sections. Daily circulation has grown from 17,000 in 1987 to 25,000 today.

Under Gannett ownership, Russell said, corporate bosses had no sense of the community, editors would come and go every couple of years and news judgment often reflected the superficial assumptions of editors at headquarters back east.

She remembers getting what she called a silly assignment to get a local angle on a worldwide shortage of Brie cheese. Brie— that was Gannett's idea of trendy Santa Fe, she said.

Another time, Gannett managers planned a special section on home improvement, relying on canned wire stories. In a town known worldwide for its architecture featuring adobe brick and plaster, and more recently for stucco as the preferred finish for houses, the managers couldn't understand why the editor, a local, balked at using a story on aluminum siding.

Today local sensitivity means representing a community long known as tricultural: Hispanic, Native American and Anglo. Members of ethnic minority groups make up one-third of the 48-person news staff, and eight reporters speak Spanish.

The New Mexican's return to local control was against all odds because corporate consolidation of America's newspapers continues unchecked.

As of April 1999, there were 1,477 daily newspapers in America, and only 269 were independent. In the last two years alone, 30 family-owned newspapers were sold to chains, according to information compiled by Dirks, Van Essen & Associates, a Santa Fe-based company that arranges newspaper sales and tracks ownership trends. As for Gannett, the roster of papers grew to 83 in 1989 and has since settled at 74 today. Community Newspaper Holdings has
"It is a newspaper's duty to print the news and raise hell."

Chicago Tribune - 1861

Dillon Tribune
Glendive Ranger Review
Livingston Enterprise
Miles City Star
Terry Tribune
KATL - AM - Miles City

Inez Russell, editor of the Taos News, a sister publication

Three Mile Island.

Then there is McKinney. One-time ambassador to Switzerland, undersecretary of the interior and member of a federal panel on atomic energy, McKinney had been back as owner of The New Mexican less than a year and half when he shocked and angered the news staff by publicly repudiating an investigative series on contamination around the national weapons laboratory 40 miles up the road at Los Alamos, N.M.

To further demonstrate his case-by-case independence on issues involving Los Alamos, he supported an award-winning investigation seven years later in which The New Mexican revealed the bloated costs, pork-barrel politics and unproven technologies associated with nuclear-weapons research in the post-Cold War era.

Independent newspapers of all sizes do some important work, from The Seattle Times’ Pulitzer-winning coverage of Boeing and of tribal housing to the in-depth series on the militia movement and on Indian life done by the family-owned Pioneer Newspapers that serve Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

Of course, chain-owned papers also publish great reporting, writing and photography. And they offer other benefits that come with the resources of big companies. Often, training opportunities, diversity programs, chances for promotion, pension plans and computer equipment are better with chains than
they are at the independents.

Back in 1976, McKinney cited those
types of benefits in explaining his deci­sion to sell the Santa Fe paper. Yet,
while he realized a big company was
best able to pay for computer upgrades
and improved employee benefits, he
also liked being a newspaper publish­er and the influence that went with it.

The conflict between him and
Gannett had roots in the details of that
1976 contract for sale. McKinney sold
The New Mexican, all right, but he also
negotiated a deal that left him in
charge. Gannett, on the other hand,
reasoned that since it paid $11.8 mil­lion for the paper, it owned the right to
run the business its way.

By 1978, the pulling and tugging
spilled into editorial policy. McKinney
endorsed Democrat Bruce King in
what that year was his first of four suc­cessful campaigns to be governor.
McKinney wanted a strong endorse­ment. However, the Gannett manage­ment went with an editorial only luke­warm in its endorsement.

The disagreement had escalated
and within months McKinney filed a
lawsuit, claiming Gannett violated
their contract by canceling his manage­ment authority. He asked to have the
paper back. Eventually he won.

Other publishers have sold and
regretted it, but McKinney wasn't like
other publishers, said Victor Marshall,
the lawyer who handled McKinney's

case. Marshall said McKinney, who
learned the art of the deal in earlier
days on Wall Street and in government
service, had three things in his favor.
First, he had a management contract
with teeth and, second, he had the
tenacity to take on a corporate giant.

"Point number three, Gannett really
did have a covert effort to get rid of
him," Marshall said. He said pressure
came from none other that Neuharth,
Gannett's powerful president. "He
thought McKinney would fold, and he
picked the wrong guy to lean on,"
Marshall said.

In the courtroom of U.S. District
Judge Santiago Campos, Gannett took
a beating. When Neuharth claimed
that McKinney had a home-court
advantage, Campos called the remark
"a mendacity that is classic in its utter
responsibility and naked malicious­ness." Another spirited fight erupted
given Gannett corporate's advice, in
dealing with McKinney, to ignore the
"coot." Campos wrote in an opinion:
"Webster says a 'coot' is 'a person,
often old and harmless and sometimes
not bright'; colloquially, a stupid fel­low, a simpleton. Any of these are most
inapt descriptions of McKinney."

The complex court case which the
judge compared to "unscrambling the
egg," lasted nine years. Even after
McKinney's victory in 1987, it was
another two years before he finally
bought the paper back.

Through it all, the question was:
Why did the people of Santa Fe care
what happened to a bunch of rich men
and their multimillion-dollar deals?

They cared because they were wit­nessing history. It was perhaps
unprecedented for the owner of an
independent newspaper to sell to a
corporation only to win it back in a
legal fight. And they cared because at
stake was the very relationship
between a community and one of its
institutions —its newspaper.
You have mail

Does e-mail cause more stress than it's worth, or is it just another tool for journalists?

By John A. Reed

It's been said that our progress is limited only by our technology. With the advent of computers, modern-day journalists have left the days of sitting in smoke-filled newsrooms, hunched over manual typewriters with a telephone receiver glued to one ear. One could argue that entry into the computer age has made a reporter's day a little easier, at least in that respect.

But the jury's still out on some of the conveniences of the computer. Take for example electronic mail, commonly known as e-mail.

In one form or another, e-mail has been around for about 20 years, albeit not the sophisticated versions one sees today, such as Microsoft Outlook, Netscape's Communicator or Eudora.

Because of e-mail's ability to go anywhere at any time, it only seemed natural that it took hold in journalistic circles. After all, journalism is all about communicating.

"[Reporters] find that it's one more tool for them to use," said Jim Strauss, executive editor of the Great Falls Tribune.

Strauss said he sees advantages to using e-mail in the newsroom—not only from a newsgathering standpoint, but also from a readership perspective. "It's been a great resource for us," he said. "I think it's a great way to correspond with readers."

The Tribune initially set up one e-mail reception point in the newsroom, but quickly found that with letters from readers and a torrent of news releases flooding in daily, maintenance became a issue, Strauss said.

Where he had only used a clerk to sort through the e-mail messages before, Strauss said the move now is toward 10 individual e-mail stations spread throughout the newsroom, so that more correspondence can be handled.

"There is an expectation for very quick responses," Strauss said. That means when a reader sends a comment to him or one of the other newsroom staff, it necessitates getting back to the person in short order. In that way, e-mail messages are more like phone calls.

Strauss said it adds a whole new level of stress in dealing with your readers, and makes interactivity with them almost as significant for the newspaper manager as getting the paper off the presses.

But Strauss doesn't want to diminish the upside to using e-mail for the practicing journalist. In fact, he readily admits that he's hooked on using it and has been for some time—both personally and professionally.

In fact, he said his first exposure to e-mail was in 1990 when he was working on his MBA at Notre Dame. It was a boon to him in school.

It was in his stint as assistant managing editor at the Fort Wayne (Ind.) News Sentinel that Strauss' e-mail skyrocketed.

"I really got hooked on it there," he said.

As a newspaper manager, Strauss said he's sold on e-mail for a number of reasons. First, he frequently uses e-mail to recruit prospective reporters. A well-timed e-mail message to someone he wants to hire can keep the person interested in working for the Tribune.

And he said he uses e-mail to correspond with other editors across the country, both in the Gannett chain, which owns his paper, as well as with newsmen at other dailies and weeklies.

E-mail also is the choice for Strauss when checking on the Tribune's bureaus in Helena and Havre, and with Gannett's Washington, D.C., news service. Strauss said e-mail makes a for a good management tool.
"In the newsroom itself," he said, "I use it to send reminders and updates ... it's an enhancement (for communications)."

Dave Byerly, publisher of the Lewistown News-Argus, echoed Strauss on the advantage of e-mail from a readership-feedback standpoint. At his newspaper, a new web site invites the on-line reader to send comments to the paper via an e-mail link. It seems to be taking off, if the e-mail response is any indication.

"We're getting more comments (with e-mail)," Byerly said, commenting that the paper's web page has only been up and running since February.

"E-mail is a way for people to interact with us—people who would never write us or call us," Byerly said. "It's a tool that seems to be opening doors with readers that wasn't there before."

Both Byerly and Strauss said e-mail could easily get out of control, though, if there weren't some guidelines for its use in the newsroom.

The one thing both agree on is that using e-mail for anything other than basic back-grounding or fact-checking with a source is unacceptable. For reporters, that means no interviewing using e-mail.

"My experience in reporting for 20 years is that I want to hear that voice [in a telephone interview]," Byerly said. "We are not using e-mail to interview people."

Strauss sees e-mail as a means to an end—not as a solution for everything. For contacting an expert with a question, e-mail is most times better than playing "phone tag" with the person. But on the other hand, he feels that nothing will ever replace personal contact for interviewing.

"[Using e-mail for interviews] takes away from the spontaneity of an interview," Strauss said. And that means the reporter just can't get a feel for how his source is reacting to the questions.

Bob Sablatura, a reporter with the Houston Chronicle and director of the online Reporter's Network, said e-mail could become a delaying mechanism for some reporters, or for that matter, anyone who uses it.

"The phone is immediate," Sablatura
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said. “I was always able to put things off with e-mail.”

In his 11 years as an investigative reporter on long-term public policy stories, Sablatura has found that e-mail is a great way to gather facts and locate sources. But when it comes time to interviewing his sources, Sablatura said face-to-face interviews or ones by phone are the only way to go.

 “[E-mail] comes across as monotonous,” Sablatura said. “I’ve never quoted anyone in an e-mail interview. I tend not to do e-mail interviews.”

For Sablatura, the shortcoming of e-mail is that a person can spend too much time sending messages and responding to them, and as a result, become nothing more than an extension of the computer.

“If you let e-mail become immediate,” he said, “you’re tied to your computer in a negative way.”

For Rohn Wood, being tied to his computer because of e-mail is all in a day’s work.

Wood, a systems analyst for the University of Montana’s Information Technology Resource Center, was a photojournalist before he caught the computer bug.

In his six-year tenure at UM, he’s worked intimately with Selway, the university’s e-mail system that now serves more than 11,000 users.

But sometimes the day-to-day routine of dealing with e-mail can have unanticipated effects, Wood said.

“As I get into the e-mail thing, I find myself getting farther and farther away from social discourse,” Wood said, remarking on the distancing from people e-mail seems to create.

“I think it depersonalizes some people, if they’re inclined to be that way.”

Paradoxically, e-mail can also help users meet people on-line that they wouldn’t otherwise meet. “I see e-mail breaking down social barriers that keep people apart,” Wood said.

It’s also good for organizing tasks, he noted. Where it makes the difference for him is in the workplace. “It helps us facilitate what we do.”

Still, he argues, if e-mail were gone tomorrow, society wouldn’t miss it.

Jim Camden, senior reporter for the Spokane Spokesman-Review, finds the whole e-mail conundrum not that daunting. And, for the most part, he sees no real controversy one way or the other as to its uses.

He hopes that journalists see it as just another tool of the trade—no different that a tape recorder, notebook or dictionary.

“E-mail is no different than regular mail,” he said. “You get a lot of junk.” But, on the other hand, e-mail is great for disseminating things like press releases. That, he said, avoids a torrent of paper faxes swirling around the newsroom.

“It can be a real pain in the butt,” Camden said, “but it’s easily taken care of. Just hit the x-button (delete).”

Camden’s approach to e-mail’s omnipresence in the newsroom is simple: humor.

“On the plus side,” he said, chuckling, “you don’t get any paper cuts.”
Much ado about nothing

In which a lowly, unpaid intern observes the wacky world of Washington, D.C.

BY YUKARI USUDA

Standing in a hallway of the Senate building, I secretly regret not mastering a four-count rhythm while studying at the University of Montana. That’s not the beat of an elegant fox-trot, but the Big Sky Country’s famous fly fishing rhythm. I went fishing once when I was two years old, but I don’t remember anything, including the fish I caught. And in theory, I should be having no time to think about it because I’m on a mission. This is my first day at the Senate as an intern from Kyodo News, the largest Japanese wire service that distributes news both in English and Japanese, to more than 300 agencies in the world. A Kyodo story can reach 25 million people in Japan alone, 67 million globally.

My mission after a Senate hearing is to ask a big shot questions and record his or her comments on tape, a process the reporters at Washington bureaus call “hanging.” Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin is now taking questions from assertive reporters, regarding “trade policy in the era of globalization.” Many journalists here use a Japanese brand recorder, I suspect, no matter what he says about trade. Holding a Sony tape recorder in my hand, I’ve been stretching up my right arm for the last seven minutes in hopes of recording his comments. The problem is, though—Oh, Christ—my arm is getting numb. Switching the recorder from my right hand to my left in the crowd is a mission impossible.

I’m five feet tall and weigh about one-fifteenth of a big polar bear, which weighs 1,400 pounds. In short, I’m petite. Yet the journalists show no mercy, surrounding me like a wall. I sense the recorder, even with Sony’s advanced technology, is not catching the secretary’s voice much. If only I had a rod and line to hang the recorder right above Rubin’s head, I would accomplish my mission.

While my mind is wandering around, the interview abruptly ends with his assistant’s closing line, “Thank you.” I’m free from the physical pain, but am still in great pain from having taken a defeat. What can I say to a correspondent who asked me to handle the “hanging” because he had to go back to the office? Can I tell him my dog ate the tape? Should I hang myself? I spot another Kyodo correspondent in the hallway. As I start telling him my story, he cuts me off. “I got it,” he says. He promptly becomes my hero and remains so to this day.

My days in D.C. are largely marked by one sort of fiasco after another. I answer a
call, try to transfer it and push the wrong telephone button, disconnecting the call. I go to shoot photos, but fail to bring enough film for the Kodak moments. My first English story—"Convicted U.S. criminal spared execution on plea by Pope"—ends up misinforming people. I intend to report that 100,000 people attended the Pope's mass, but a typo is a zero short, which makes the number used in the story off by 90,000 people. A big mess. I recall what one of my favorite UM professors would say in class: "Check numbers, accuracy, accuracy." I feel pathetic, and then have a second thought: I might be having a better time than President Clinton did with the impeachment trial.

"What's new?" asks a young American reporter who has big, cute eyes and even bigger curiosity. "Nothing," I say. "The same old story." Although news keeps pouring into the bureau, it basically says something bad happened somewhere in the world. I recall a Kingston Trio song that favorite professor sang: They're rioting in Africa, they're starving in Spain, There're hurricanes in Florida, and Texas needs rain. The whole world is festering with unhappy souls...

A White House official says more than 40 million children in the world will be orphaned by AIDS by the end of the next decade, and that the vast majority of those live in Sub-Saharan Africa. More than 580,000 ethnic Albanians have fled from Kosovo, where atrocity continues. They lost their homes. Many lost hope. They starve. This has led the American leaders of the "make love, not war" generation in the 1960s to carry out air campaigns. Hurricane Mitch left a deep scar in Central America, and a Colorado school shooting rampage left the nation struggling to find the answers to why.

Without knowledge of fly fishing or much else, I cast my fate in the nation's capital. I did it out of curiosity, one disproportionally huge to my small body. I wanted to get a glimpse of top level politics, working with the topnotch reporters at Kyodo News. It's been interesting. I get an opportunity to see famous people in person, not through a TV set or go to a place like the White House briefing room, which is tiny and rather disappointing. I've sat in on a U.S. Supreme Court oral argument and National Press Club events. I read stories, especially those in the Washington Post, to see how reporters have written about the events I attended.

Plus, I even write something. The deputy chief, mainly, revises my Japanese draft while the correspondent (my hero) edits my English piece to make it a news story. One of those stories—with heavy editing—has made it to the front page in an English newspaper in Japan. I've been learning a little bit. And the experience I've been gaining is precious. Everything does count in the long run. But I still wonder what the heck I'm doing here. Being naive?

I know I can't change the world. Making a change for better or worse is for big-time players. They give reporters a press release after making a big decision on a big issue by examining big figures. I can't often see individual faces in such press releases. To me, it seems decisions are made in a comfortable room far away from the problems. And when the AIDS issue gets little media attention while the sentencing of Mike Tyson brings a media frenzy to a Maryland court, what are the media doing to help the world become a better place to live? Just wondering.

Well, it's hard to say, because the world is complex. All I know is my policy remains simple even in the era of globalization—enjoy the small things like casting a fish line and getting it tangled around a cherry tree by the Jefferson Memorial. While waiting for a beaver to come and help me, I can ponder what to do next after the internship is over.

But in fact, I have no time to think about it because I have a mission to carry out. Holding the Sony recorder, I stay alert not to miss today's big shots emerging from a hearing room. Oh, here comes Deputy Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers. Sir, wait up for me—please?
sell ads to businesses with the same interest or focus.

"They know no one is going to read these things. I mean, who gives a shit? So they fill the thing with copy that there is absolutely no reader demand for, but that doesn’t matter. Reader interest isn’t even germane; it’s not discussed. The only reason they put stories in there at all is so they don’t have to fill it up with Xs and Os.”

Ludwick says that the resulting time crunch means the Missoulian often hits the streets with little more than a once-over-lightly from editors, at best. In fact, he says that staffers the paper calls copy editors are page designers trained to worry more about how a page looks than what it says.

"The paper operates under the illusion that there is an editing system in place, but in fact, the front-line editors are spending their time on all these revenue-driven projects that are incredibly time-consuming to manage. I’ve had stories, many stories, run in the Missoulian that only I had read. No one but me looked at those stories before they went out to readers. That’s one reason why there’s the gross lack of precision in so many stories and headlines.”

Ludwick’s criticisms echo those leveled by others, ranging from other former Lee employees—like David Crisp, a former Gazette editor who left to found the weekly Billings Outpost [see p. 42], to Nathaniel Blumberg, the irascible former dean of The UM School of Journalism. Blumberg self-publishes a newsletter, the Treasure State Review, which is essentially a broadsheet dedicated to attacking Lee.

"I’ve never attempted to hide the fact that I have nothing but contempt for the way they run the company,” Blumberg says. "I tried to persuade them to honor their total responsibility to put out a quality product that serves as a watchdog on local government, that’s not completely oriented in favor of the extractive industries and all their many sins.”

Blumberg is probably the dean of Lee critics (Ludwick insists that many of the ex-prof’s critiques have been off-base), but he’s not the only one. Missoula-based environmental journalist Richard Manning devoted much of his first book, the now out-of-print timber industry expose Last Stand, to his struggles with Missoulian management in the late ’80s and early ’90s. After clashing repeatedly with higher-ups over his coverage of logging in Montana, Manning left the paper in a storm of controversy.

“That’s all ancient history,” Manning says now. “Some of the stuff going on right now is much more interesting. It’s the continued, excessive commercialization of the news. This Millenium project they’re doing is worse than ridiculous. They came into the newsroom and said, we’ve figured out how to generate revenue. You will create a beat to make this possible.”

The Corporate Coming

The only thing readers of Lee newspapers can be certain of is that Lee has established a stake in their communities. From wooing advertisers with Celebrate 2000 initiatives to carefully setting a strategic profit plan at each paper, Lee has pursued an agenda that’s sure to keep Lee firmly rooted in each of the regions where it has made its presence known.

To be sure, Montana’s media landscape is much healthier than it was back in the days of the “copper collar,” when the Anaconda Copper Co. owned most of the news in the state. And yet, some would argue that, four decades later, there are still questions that need to be asked about where our news is coming from, and what motives have brought it to the page. At least Montana’s news-consumers aren’t in an unusual situation: As profit-driven companies continue to buy up independent media outlets across the United States, more and more readers are being faced with fewer and fewer options. And most of those options, it may soon turn out, will be corporate newspapers. For those who work in the industry, it’s almost an article of faith.

“There’s been a trend going for probably 30 to 40 years of family-owned businesses being sold to larger group organizations,” former publisher John Talbot says. “I’m afraid the march toward-corporate owned media is inevitable.”