

## Community Newsroom Success Strategies

# **BAD NEWS AND GOOD JUDGMENT: A GUIDE TO REPORTING ON SENSITIVE ISSUES**

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Webinar



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## **DEVELOPING POLICY: THREE-STEP PROCESS**

### **Set policy:**

Brainstorm the parameters of your policies with your entire newspaper family beyond the newsroom.

Seek the opinions of individuals in community, especially those who may have particular connection to or perspective on a policy. For example, speak with grief counselors for a policy on the reporting of suicides.

Be respectful of the opinions of others that you seek, but make it clear that the specifics of any policy rests with the newspaper.

### **Implement policy:**

Once policies are in place, stick to them. Exceptions should be rare.

Be open to review if warranted by specific circumstances.

Make decisions based on the “what” and not “whom.” For example, a friend of the publisher should not warrant special treatment.

### **Explain the policy:**

Be proactive and not reactive.

Make the case internally as well as externally.

## **SPORTS SUSPENSIONS**

### Premise

Newspapers devote a great deal of resources to reporting high school sports and in many cases are real boosters of teams and individual athletes. Readers also deserve to know when individuals are unable to participate – whether due to injury, sickness, family emergency, discipline or violation of participation rules.

### Parameters

- Report suspensions for any player on any varsity team – whether a starter or a reserve.
- Keep reports brief – usually two or three sentences – and include information within the report of the first contest which the player misses. Identify the player, the reason for the suspension – i.e. violation of local school district or high school league rules, and the length of the suspension.
- Newspapers may decide to further identify the nature of the suspension: i.e. academic reasons or violation of drug/alcohol rules.
- Make it clear when players are being disciplined for second or third offenses, and note the accompanying penalties.
- In general, do not go to extra lengths to report when suspended players return to a lineup.
- Suspensions of players on nonvarsity teams usually will not be reported.
- Many suspensions are common knowledge. Nonetheless, newspapers must get confirmation of all suspensions – whether it's on the record or off the record – prior to publication.
- Keep reports timely, reporting suspensions as they occur and not days or weeks after the fact.

### Consistency

The policy should apply to all sports teams within readership areas. It's unrealistic, however, to expect that staffs will be aware of all suspensions.

### Communication

The policy should be distributed to all schools. Newspapers also might consider alerting sports booster clubs to the policy.

## **Story: Wingers send South St. Paul packing**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

SOUTH ST. PAUL – In a sense, Andrew Trapanese was trying to fill two pairs of skates Tuesday.

Not only was the Red Wing junior starting in place of the more experienced Joe Edstrom, he is one of two goalies trying to replace Bryce Barry, who graduated from the Winger net after last season.

Trapanese proved he's ready for varsity action by helping the Wingers to a 5-2 nonconference win over South St. Paul in the season opener.

Trapanese, a junior varsity goalie last season, stopped 16 of 18 shots on goal and shut the Packers out in the final period.

"He had some big saves for us," Red Wing Coach George Nemanich said. "He's going to have to stand tall back there for us to win."

The Wingers started their tough nonconference schedule – it includes games against Class AA champ Apple Valley and Class A power Totino Grace – on a slow note. They were held scoreless until second-period goals by Tom Moore and Mark Pohl put the Wingers ahead 2-1. South St. Paul's Tony Sylvester tied the score late in the second.

But that was all the scoring the Packers could muster. John Pohl made it 2-1 five minutes into the third and sealed the win with an open-netter late in the game. After the Packers put the goalie back in net to end the game, Josh Marklevits tacked on one more goal with a second left.

"That was kind of a cake goal, but I was glad to see him get it because he played such a good defensive game," Nemanich said of Marklevits, who teamed with Jordan Anderson and Scott Heilman to provide a strong third line.

Moore and John Pohl added three and two assists, respectively.

"All three of our lines gave us consistent offensive pressure," Nemanich said. "In the first game, there are usually a lot of things that go wrong. But the guys looked very smooth and consistent."

Edstrom, on suspension for a State High School League violation, will be out one more game and will be eligible to play against Apple Valley Dec. 10.

## **Story: Wingers wait until the 3<sup>rd</sup>** *Red Wing Republican Eagle*

Defenseman Brian Cashman's slap shot was the first of three third-period goals and provided the winning score in Red Wing's 4-1 victory over Owatonna Friday at Bergwall Arena.

Red Wing's offense came alive in the final period after Owatonna played the third-ranked Wingers to a 1-1 tie after two periods.

The Red Wing players and Coach George Nemanich declined comment after the game in a unified protest over a paragraph in Tuesday's newspaper about a player who was serving a suspension.

The Wingers will take a 2-0 record into Apple Valley Tuesday when they play the defending Class AA champion.

"They are a great team and they took advantage of the big opportunities," said Owatonna Coach Dennis Will, whose club surprised the Red Wing faithful by silencing the Wingers' high-powered offense for two periods.

Sophomore goaltender Adam Hanna stopped 14 of 15 shots through the first two periods, surrendering the only score when a goaltenders' nightmare – John Pohl alone on a breakaway – appeared in front of him.

Pohl intercepted a pass in the Wingers' zone off a faceoff, raced untouched toward Hanna and put a shot over the goalie's shoulder for a shorthanded goal.

"Good players can pick up on other people's mistakes," Will said of Pohl's play.

But the Huskies took advantage of the power play 7 seconds later, when Anthony Koziolk tapped in a rebound off Andrew Trapanese's pads.

It remained 1-1 until the third, when Cashman, assisted with a pass by Pohl, scored on a power play that started late in the second period. Goals by Josh Vonch at 8:01 and Tom Moore two minutes later put the game out of reach.

Trapanese, making his second varsity start of his career, was consistent throughout the game and brilliant at times. The junior stopped 20 of 21 shots against the pesky Huskies, who fell to 1-3.

"They have key people at a lot of positions, and they move the puck well," Will said.

## **Editorial: Athletes' accountability**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

The Red Wing hockey team – players and coaches – refused to talk to the Republican Eagle following Friday's home victory over Owatonna. Their reason: They were upset by this newspaper's report – one sentence in a Dec. 4 article – stating that a starter was suspended for two games due to a violation of Minnesota State High School League rules.

Was it fair for the R-E to report the suspension? We believe so, as outlined in the accompanying column by Editor Jim Pumarlo.

This is not the first time players have been suspended. Our aim is to be consistent. Among the most visible cases in previous years, all of which were reported in the R-E:

- A Red Wing basketball team was state-ranked and cruising through the conference schedule relatively uncontested. The team unexpectedly lost. Why? Two starters were missing: One was disciplined by the school; the other was on a college recruitment visit.
- A Winger golf team, fresh off a subsection team victory, had high hopes for a state tournament appearance. But officials stripped a Red Wing golfer of medalist honors due to a high school league violation on the course and suspended him from further competition. The team, minus its leader, lost in the next round.
- Two key Winger baseball players were suspended for actions on the ball field.

Suspensions, to be sure, are embarrassing – and maybe even hurtful – to the affected individuals, families, friends and teammates. But suspensions also are news, especially when they have a direct impact on a team. A suspension is one of the facts of a game report.

Our system is not perfect. We're unlikely to find out -- and therefore to report -- if a third-stringer on the 40-man football team has been suspended. Or if a No. 8 player on a basketball team in an outlying school district is barred from playing. Or if a student is prohibited from participating in a debate meet.

But that does not mean we should ignore obvious news – and the truth, especially when fans are asking why key players are noticeably absent. Public interest is especially intense in the Winger hockey team, which finished runner-up in last year's state tournament and currently is ranked No. 2.

The bottom line is student accountability. Participants in co-curricular activities sign pacts to abide by Minnesota State High School League rules. They also are fully aware of academic requirements set by schools.

Finally, how can this newspaper accurately and in good conscience report an athletic event without referring to the missing players – especially when the circumstances and consequences are so public?

The most noteworthy case in recent years was in March when statewide attention was focused on the Minneapolis North basketball team. The Polars culminated their 30-0 season with a state championship as two players sat on the bench due to poor school grades and attendance.

The lesson was instructive, especially in a society where the preoccupation with sports – and winning and losing – has come at the expense of many other values. Most refreshing was that Minneapolis North administration stuck by the rules and publicly delivered that message.

## Column: Why we print sports suspensions

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

**By Jim Pumarlo**  
**Editor**

*At least once a year the Republican Eagle is challenged about its practice of publishing names of players suspended from varsity sports competition. The following column originally was published in January 1991:*

Is the suspension of a high school athlete news? The R-E thinks so, particularly when it affects a game's outcome. We routinely identify those suspended; it's longstanding policy.

By identifying a youth, are we really looking out for his or her best welfare? We think so, though it may not be immediately recognized by the youth, parents or coach.

The issue goes beyond sports. It quite often involves chemical health and as such is part of a far greater community issue.

Not all agree with the publication of names, and we've heard about it, especially with the rash of suspensions the past few weeks. We do not take the issue lightly, and have spent several hours in meetings and seeking the opinions of others. They represent parents, coaches, fans, athletic boosters, social workers, chemical dependency workers and school boards. Our employees have had personal experiences, and we've looked into the policies of other newspapers.

Tuesday morning I spent an hour with about 12 coaches and school administrators. Coaches generally seem opposed to our policy, though not without exception. It's important for coaches – and readers – to understand our policy.

Several reasons

Players are suspended for a variety of reasons – from academic and disciplinary to alcohol and tobacco violations. A suspension may be for a game, a couple of weeks or even longer.

Missing players can affect a team's performance. That's the primary reason we report them. It's part of the game story. If a player is injured, it's reported. If someone is out for other reasons, that ought to be told, too.

There are other reasons for telling the truth.

- Suspended players, looking perfectly healthy, sit on the bench during a game. Fans deserve to be told why.
- Players may miss a game for other legitimate reasons. A general statement – “several players were missing either due to suspensions or injuries” – unfairly brands them all.
- In most cases – particularly those involving tobacco or alcohol violations – players have a choice whether to be involved in an activity which may result in suspension. Before they can play athletics, they sign a contract to abide by rules of the Minnesota State High School League. Players get suspended for actual consumption of alcohol or tobacco. Previously, youths were guilty simply by association.
- The overwhelming volume of news about players is “good news.” It may involve the winning score, the decisive volley, the perfect dive, etc. It seems to us that we send the wrong message to young people if we report only the feats that make them heroes and not the mistakes that reveal them as human.

### General guidelines

Moreover, we think a case can be made for constructing suspensions as “good news.” Each report is an acknowledgement that coaches are holding youths accountable for their actions. It’s a positive reflection on playing by the rules as opposed to winning at any cost.

Is the R-E sensationalizing suspensions only to sell newspapers? We’re insulted by such criticism. If that was our intent, we’d run a photo and put the name in page-one headlines. Rather, our style is to make the report as courteous as possible and generally in a simple sentence.

We do have general guidelines which are constantly reviewed. Our thinking has been changed during the past few weeks.

- Names are printed for varsity players only, unless there are extenuating circumstances. For example, if four players are suspended – one dresses for varsity and the others don’t – fairness dictates that they be treated alike.
- Suspensions henceforth will be acknowledged by the word “suspension” only. Generally, no further details as to the type of suspension are necessary.
- If possible, suspensions are noted when they occur, and then in a simple statement of fact. Typically, that’s the last mention we’ll make.

### Higher standards

Critics charge double-standards in reporting these violations of high school policy. What about the youth who gets picked up for illegal alcohol consumption, but remains nameless? What about the one who is withheld for band or speech competition for rules violations?

By society’s own standards, sports are a class apart. Community interest has dictated that the R-E cover high school sports on a day-to-day basis, unlike other extracurricular activities.

One high school booster reminded me of the credo of Pete Petrich, longtime Winger basketball coach. He preached to his players that they were held to higher standards, and deservedly so. People supported the programs with tax dollars. People paid to watch them play.

### Community focus

We view the issue of suspensions – particularly those involving alcohol and tobacco – in the larger context of a communitywide concern. We’ve observed and often endorsed the community’s efforts toward education and prevention. We’ve seen the school district, the city, the county and United Way commit dollars and resources to fighting this problem. We’ve seen coaches spearhead support groups to help athletes deal with ever-present pressures.

We think coaches can use the suspension to work positively with youths, and make them better for it.

It’s our intent to make the R-E part of the solution. That’s why we’ve sought advice from all quarters on the issue and will continue to do so.

Meanwhile, our commitment remains to report high school sports in a positive vein. Of all the millions of words written during the course of a high school year, the notation of “suspensions” is minuscule.

Lastly, we quote one of Red Wing’s most faithful sports boosters who we polled on the issue. He acknowledged the increasing number of suspensions, but hadn’t really given much thought to it. Pressed a little further, he said it might be a bit embarrassing to the youth. But, he added, “It’s the truth.”



## ACCIDENTS

### Premise

Accidents, especially those involving serious injuries or fatalities, are among the staples of community news. Accidents frequently are of a very public nature and disrupt traffic.

### Parameters

- Photos of accident scenes – but not necessarily the victims – are the news.
- Avoid publication of gruesome photos. To be specific, do not publish photos which show body parts of victims or pools of blood.
- Be sensitive to photos which show outlines of bodies, even if they are covered. These photos may be appropriate to use, but covered bodies, in general, should not be the focal point of photos.
- Every victim has a life story. Place as much vigor in tracking down and reporting the life stories of victims as a photo of their last moments of life.
- Reactions of bystanders – though often a good photo opportunity – might require sensitivity, too, especially if bystanders are immediate family members.
- Some images of accident scenes are best described in text.
- A checklist of items should be standard protocol for all accident stories which result in serious injuries and/or deaths. Were all vehicle occupants wearing seat belts? Were motorcycle drivers/passengers wearing helmets? Were tickets issued? Was influence of drugs/alcohol a factor? What were weather and road conditions?

### Consistency

Photo coverage is haphazard by the nature of circumstances. But newspapers can be consistent in the subject matter of photos and the information included in stories.

### Communication

Law enforcement authorities should be aware of newspaper policies for accident coverage, especially in terms of coverage at the scenes. Authorities often are reluctant to permit reporters and/or photographers near the site and may even try to prohibit them from talking with anyone. Reporters also have a responsibility to conduct themselves in a professional manner. Fewer confrontations will occur if both sides sit down and agree on ground rules in advance. This should be done with any agency the newspaper may come in contact with – including local police, county sheriffs and state patrols.

RED WING  
REPUBLICAN

# Eagle

FRIDAY, APRIL 30, 1989

RED WING, MINNESOTA 55050

## Senate takes up tax issue

The plan would eliminate the estate tax for those who die in 1991 and those who die in 1992. It would also eliminate the gift tax for those who die in 1991 and those who die in 1992.

**This is the day that the taxpayers of Minnesota have waited for for years.**

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The activities section of the program includes a variety of options for participants, including a choice of different levels of participation and a choice of different types of activities.

**OPEN SCHEDULE**  
The open schedule section of the program allows participants to choose from a variety of different options, including a choice of different levels of participation and a choice of different types of activities.

**PROGRESS SYSTEM**  
The progress system section of the program allows participants to track their progress through the program and receive feedback on their performance.

**LESSONS**  
The lessons section of the program includes a variety of different lessons, including a choice of different levels of participation and a choice of different types of activities.

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Red Evans (left) comforts Neil Stummert after Stummert's motorcycle was involved in a collision with a truck on Highway 61. Neil Stummert is in the truck. Photo by Bill Tracy.

## Motorcyclist dies in collision with truck



A Red Wing sadistic scene investigated by police on Highway 61 Thursday night.

By Bill Tracy

A 28-year-old Red Wing man died in a collision with a truck on Highway 61 Thursday night. The motorcyclist, Neil Stummert, was riding his motorcycle when it was struck by the front end of a truck. Stummert was killed on the spot.

The truck driver, Neil Stummert, was arrested on charges of negligent homicide. He is being held in jail.

The accident occurred on Highway 61, just north of Red Wing. The truck was traveling north on the highway when it struck the motorcycle.

The truck was a 1987 Ford F-150 pickup truck. The driver, Neil Stummert, was 28 years old and had been driving for several years.

The motorcycle was a Harley-Davidson. It was traveling south on Highway 61 when it was struck by the truck.

The accident occurred at approximately 10:30 p.m. on Thursday night. The weather was clear and dry.

The truck was involved in a collision with the motorcycle. The truck was traveling north on Highway 61, and the motorcycle was traveling south on Highway 61.

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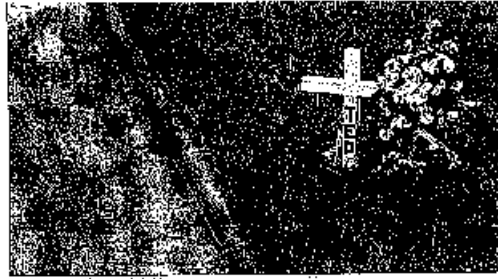
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Ted Dokken is remembered with a memorial placed along Highway 51 by his family. — staff photo by Bill Ford

Jim  
**Pumarlo**

Editor

## The photos said it all

A city dump truck and a motorcycle collided at noon last Thursday just a few miles out of downtown, killing the cyclist and leaving the city worker in shock. Officials at City Hall issued a statement offering condolences to the family of the victim and took steps to help employees deal with the emotional stress.

The R-E carried the story the next day, complete with photos of the despondent driver being consoled by a passer-by and of the accident scene. The photos indeed were worth the proverbial thousand words.

The coverage of the accident drew immediate reaction from readers who charged the R-E with publishing insensitive and tasteless photos.

One reader, whose comments were not published, called to say she could not find a single person who thought we should have run the photos, especially of the truck driver. A fourth grader even threw down the newspaper in disgust, she said.

Reporting tragedies in words and photos is always a challenge. But the fact remains: Fatal accidents are significant events in the life of a community. No information travels faster than that of a tragic accident.

### Accurate photo

In this case, especially, the photos captured the essence of the moment. No words were necessary to describe the emotion of the truck driver, Neil Stegmann of Red Wing.

"I thought the photo was accurate," said Stegmann by telephone earlier this week, obviously still trying to deal with the death of the motorcyclist, Ted Dokken. "The photo had to be accurate. It was a life scene situation."

We had called Stegmann to ask how he felt about the R-E's coverage. One call was not to seek endorsement of the photo, but to explain that it



part of the difficult job of printing the news.

We considered the feelings of the Dokken family as well when we chose to run a photo of the motorcyclist and truck. We respect those who disagree with our decision. A letter elsewhere on this page from Teri Hillman, Ted's sister, expresses her dismay with the coverage.

Criticism from readers was no surprise. It even was expected as we selected the photos, knowing they will be part of the permanent record of the tragedy.

The decision to print the photos was not a snap judgment, and we do have guidelines.

We refrain as best we can from publishing photographs that show the deceased. The more sensitive photos often are those of bystanders and friends at the scene. The rest of the information can be conveyed in the story.

### Responsible coverage

Some readers always will contend that such coverage is sensationalism. We readily accept opposing viewpoints — and criticism when it's warranted — but we reject the blanket charge.

The R-E, in contrast with the television industry, is quite sensitive regarding graphic photos and descriptive text. Often those involved in bad accidents are neighbors and acquaintances of people at the newspaper. This accident was no different.

But our responsibility is to report the news — good and bad. Violence and grief are very much a part of everyday life. In this case, we deemed it appropriate to show the tragic moment, but we do not minimize the fact that there are strong differences of opinion.

Editor Jim Pumarlo can be reached at 353-2214, ext. 122. He is a member of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

## **Letter: Family member shocked by accident photos**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

To the Editor:

I pray that the Lord will guide me as I write these words:

The tragedy of the loss of our beloved Ted Dokken has been beyond description. Our pain has been overwhelming, and only our faith and the outpouring of love and support make it even slightly bearable.

I know I speak for my entire family when I say these words. Now I will speak for myself.

The coverage by the Republican Eagle (April 30) was a shock and a bitter disappointment. Color photographs of the accident scene made the motorcycle on which Ted was killed visible. Although any anger I felt at the truck driver dissipated when I saw his body slumped and grief-stricken, this forgiveness would have come anyway. The speeding of that process was not worth the added shame and agony to him and his family by blasting his name and image across the front page.

The complete circumstances of the accident are unknown to me at this time, but it seems ironic the newspaper had so much information and could relay that "Dokken hit the single-axle dump truck broadside." From what I understand, this was simply a terrible accident and there was nothing my brother could have done to avoid it.

Ted was an incredibly skilled and careful driver, and was wearing nearly 50 pounds of protective gear to drive less than two miles to his workplace. Some comfort comes from knowing he died doing something that he loved.

I ask that the R-E have compassion for Ted's family and friends in the weeks ahead as more information about the accident becomes available. Never again should a person have to experience the compounding of loss I felt when I saw that cover story. When my youngest brother went to the newspaper office to obtain extra copies of the obituary, he was asked to pay half-price.

While I realize that knowledge of circumstances in a situation such as this aids us in acceptance and understanding, there is a difference between that and morbid curiosity. Let us keep in mind that we are all members of the human family, and take a stand to let the media know we no longer will tolerate such insensitivity.

Anyone who knew Ted loved him. He was truly a unique and beautiful creation, and he saw worth and goodness in everyone. His sense of humor, kindness, intelligence and ambition are but a tiny fraction of the things that I remember about him. His nephews and niece adored him, and he them. I look forward to the day when I will see Ted again, as the Lord has promised.

Teri (Dokken) Hillmann  
Bemidji, Minn.

## **Column: The photos said it all**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

**By Jim Pumarlo**  
**Editor**

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But our responsibility is to report the news – good and bad. Violence and grief are very much a part of everyday life. In this case, we deemed it appropriate to show the tragic moment, but we do not minimize the fact that there are strong differences of opinion.

## **Letter: Editor excels at explaining news decisions**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

To the Editor:

I have been impressed for some time with the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of Editor Jim Pumarlo's responses to readers in his editor's column.

The responses are always very well thought-out and explained to readers in a logical way. The decisions are drawn from looking at many perspectives: public sensitivity, the public's right to know, newspaper ethics, and accuracy in reporting community issues.

I am impressed with the overview he takes of public issues, and I am particularly impressed with his ability to express that overview in a way that is logical and concise.

Many people seem to look at issues from only one perspective which is probably why they get so upset when that "only one perspective" is not shared. Life is not that simple. There are many ways to look at any issue, and I have great respect for the way the editor integrates and balances those perspectives in editorial decisions.

Explaining decisions or beliefs as he does allows people to at least understand that decisions are – or should be – made after a reflective and well thought-out process. He describes that process well. I commend the citizens of Red Wing for their fine editor.

Dorothy Halla-Poe  
Hager City

## SUICIDES

### Premise:

Deaths should be identified that are the result of other than natural causes. Reporting of suicides also requires greater sensitivity than deaths of other unnatural causes – for example, drowning or murder. Cause of death is a public record in most states.

### Parameters:

- Identify suicide as the cause of death in a story separate from the formal obituary.
- Report the suicide on a page separate from the obituaries. Most reports should be on an inside page.
- Identify the cause of death – i.e. self-inflicted gun wound – to squelch rumors.
- Avoid using the word “suicide” in the headline or text.
- Report suicides promptly – as quickly as information is confirmed by authorities.
- Report all suicides that occur in readership area. Do not restrict reports of suicides to those that occur in “public” areas or suicides by individuals deemed “public” figures.
- Keep reports brief, unless there are extenuating circumstances. In general, other information about the individuals – personal background, survivors – should be placed in the formal obituary.

### Consistency

Getting information in timely fashion can be the biggest hindrance to reporting suicides. Authorities often are unwilling or uncomfortable in reporting the cause of death, even when it’s deemed a public record. That means some suicides might necessarily be reported after the fact – after funerals – further aggravating a family’s grief. Newspapers must be aggressive in confirming suicides.

### Communication

The policy should be made clear with law enforcement agencies, so everyone has a clear understanding of the information being sought under state law. Funeral homes also should be alerted so they can alert families to the policy.

## **Story: Youth found dead near home**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

Brian Fox, 13, son of Richard and Patricia Fox, Welch, was found dead at 12:30 p.m. Saturday outdoors, on land near his home. Dr. Donn Leaf, Goodhue County coroner, said the cause of death was hanging. It was ruled not an accident.

## **Column: Don't cover up suicides**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

**By Jim Pumarlo**  
**Editor**

Suicide is an unnatural cause of death. It will be so noted whenever possible in the Republican Eagle.

This policy is not taken lightly. In the long run, though, we believe it's healthiest for the community and the affected families.

Not all agree. A letter elsewhere on today's page echoes sentiments expressed by others during the past few weeks.

Much of what rankles readers falls under the realm of public data. The calls never cease: someone angered over the R-E's insistence to print what's classified by the Legislature as public data. Bankruptcies, divorces and marriages, DWIs – these items and a lot more are reported regularly.

By law, causes of death are public information. Reporting suicides follows our standard policy of reporting any death by unnatural cause. A car accident, drowning, electrocution – they all are reported but usually in a story separate from the obituary.

In the case of reporting suicides, though, the "public's right to know" is a small factor in our decision. As hard as the circumstances may be, we believe acknowledging the suicide does more good than bad.

Dispel rumors

Consider:

- Word of a suicide travels quickly, and who knows how many versions are being passed around. A news article puts rumors to rest, lessening the burden on the family for relaying all the details
- We take special care when reporting suicides. The cause of death is omitted in the obituary. We're sensitive to the fact that families often save these notices.
- The actual cause of death is reported in a separate news story, almost always on a page other than where the obituary appears. We are careful not to use the word "suicide," instead reporting death by self-inflicted wound.
- We keep the reports brief – typically no more than a couple of paragraphs – and print the story as promptly as possible.

Alerts others

Routinely, the cause of death is omitted in obituaries, unless inclusion is requested by the family.

Yes, death by unnatural cause is news. But we believe our policy is one of sensitivity. We've even had families compliment us on how we report suicides.

Reporting suicides also raises the consciousness of the community. It may alert others to pay closer attention to depression and other suicidal signs among family and friends.



Too often suicides are kept quiet out of deference to the family. It's far better, we believe, to set the facts straight and let the family begin healing.

Several valid reasons are given for requesting that suicides and other public data be withheld. From the perspective of the affected parties, they all are legitimate.

But the R-E faces an "all or nothing" policy. Who's to determine if one argument is more valid than another? Such a double standard – publishing some but not others – would be a disservice to readers.

## **Letter: Senseless reporting of suicide**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

TO THE EDITOR:

I write this letter with concern and confusion. My brother-in-law passed away recently in a tragic and unexplainable death.

He was a loving family man, happily married to my sister for 22 years, a gentle devoted father to his two sons. He spent his life making our lives a little better, sharing his talents as a craftsman with hundreds of people in our community.

He became ill early this summer and fought a chemical imbalance caused from a malfunctioning thyroid. This disease plummeted him into a depression not even his family could help him out of. In the midst of his illness, he took his own life.

My confusion comes in understanding the R-E's actions in printing his story. The story had no information value. It did not tell of the fine things he accomplished in his life, the people he touched nor the lives that are better for knowing him – only the ugly details of one undignified act of a very sick man. That story did not benefit anyone and caused tremendous grief to an already devastated family.

Jerry Wallin was one of the finest men this community will ever have the privilege of knowing, and I'm so very proud to say he was my brother-in-law.

Mitzi Warrington  
Red Wing

## **Red Wing man found dead**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

A 19-year-old Red Wing man was found dead in his home 9:30 p.m. Sunday. The death of Cameron Goetz was ruled self-inflicted by hanging. He was a 2001 graduate of Red Wing High School.

Friends of Goetz are invited to attend an informal gathering from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. today at First Covenant Church. The get-together is being organized by friends of the Goetz family; counselors will be available.

## **Depression took life of Cameron Goetz Family speaks out to help others understand illness**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

Cameron "Cam" Goetz suffered from an illness that bears ultimate responsibility for his death. That illness is depression.

Goetz, 19, who graduated in 2001 from Red Wing High School, hanged himself Sunday at home. Despite the almost overwhelming loss, his parents, Bob and Susan Goetz, have not retreated into grief.

"Suffering without meaning is a tragedy," one of the counselors told them, Bob Goetz said. He and his wife have chosen to speak about what happened to their son; to give meaning to suffering by helping others understand what Cam was going through. In doing so, they hope more people will realize how dangerous depression can be.

"Cam couldn't bring himself to talk about it to anyone but us. ... He was embarrassed to let anyone know he was depressed," Bob Goetz said.

Brother's death

"We think it started with Brandon's death," she said. Brandon, his older brother, died in an auto accident in 1997.

Cam began opening up to his mother a year ago last spring, Goetz said. "He felt he had failed," she added. They arranged counseling last summer, and he went off to school in good spirits. He had a very successful year on the tennis team at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, and for the second semester his grades hit 3.9.

The depression appeared to resurface when he came home for the summer. "I believe it was where all of his sadness occurred," Susan Goetz said. Plus several things happened which piled on the stress.

Cam injured his shoulder and wasn't able to play tennis for several weeks; he'd wanted to spend the summer improving his skills. A favorite aunt was diagnosed with an aggressive, malignant brain tumor. And his cat had to be put to sleep.

Worked with counselors

They got him back into counseling and Cam was on medication for depression, his mother said. "We felt we were doing all the right things."

Counselors told them three things are needed, Bob Goetz said: Medicine, talking and love.

Cam talked mostly with his mother, but seemed to prefer the counseling this summer. She suggested he talk about his depression with his friends, but his reply was, "Absolutely not."

White males in his age group – Cam died one day before his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday – face a lot of pressures in making the transition to adulthood, she added. They’re supposed to be so strong and confident.

But kids make mistakes, his father said, recalling that Cam felt a lot of shame when he was picked up for an alcohol violation as a senior and couldn’t play in a few basketball games. “We all need to love kids not only for their achievements, but in spite of their mistakes,” Goetz said. “They’re still good kids. ... We need to hold them accountable, but forgive them and love them.”

Cam and his counselor talked about suicide when he had a session just a week ago. “He said he would rather live as a hermit than to cause that pain for us again,” Susan Goetz said. “He loved us. But something in his illness changed so that he couldn’t ...”

#### Something changed

The fact that he had plans for a couple of “good news” outings also made Cam’s decision to end his life a surprise. He had told the counselor he was going to the Minnesota Vikings game last week, which he did, and that he and his father were going to Hazeltine National Golf Club for the PGA championship on Friday – which instead is the day of his funeral.

“For him to say that Wednesday and take his life Saturday” doesn’t follow, his mother said. “There were no events. It was the illness; the chemical makeup changed.”

The Goetzes understand that some people may be angry with Cam for taking an action that hurt his parents and others. Those people don’t know what Cam was going through.

“People have got to understand that wasn’t Cam,” his father said. “It was an illness controlling his life.” When people are depressed, “their thinking is distorted.” He knows. Bob Goetz has suffered from low-grade depression for 20 years, and also is taking medication.

#### Community response

“We want to talk about it,” he said, On Monday he received a phone call from a dean at the college Cam attended, expressing not only condolences but also understanding. The man, who also lost a son to suicide a few months ago, has been trying to convey a message about the importance of talking openly about depression.

If society could look at depression like diabetes or some other common illness, maybe people would not feel a need to be macho and refuse to accept help, the couple explained.

Two things mean a lot right now to the Goetz family, which also includes Stephanie, a senior at Red Wing High School this fall. “People’s love, and knowing that God is faithful,” Susan Goetz said. “We will be angry and we will be questioning, but God is the only source of strength.”

Her husband agreed. “God is greater than what we can throw at him. ... It is so real that God is there for us, bringing peace in the most tragic moments of your life. ...”

“I think love is at the root,” he added. “Red Wing is so wonderful,” and it’s not just people from their church, friends and work associates. He has been a pharmacist with Corner Drug since 1981, and she has been teaching at Jefferson and Sunnyside schools since 1991.

“The community of faith, the community of love is so awesome in Red Wing,” Goetz said. “We experienced it five years ago, and it hasn’t changed.”

# Column: Goetz family shows immense courage

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

**By Jim Pumarlo**  
**Editor**

The death of Cameron Goetz resonated throughout Red Wing last week. The 19-year-old son of Bob and Susan Goetz, and brother of Stephanie, took his own life Aug. 11. The pain was exacerbated by the fact that five years earlier his brother, Brandon, was killed in a car accident.

Yet, less than three days after the death, the Goetzes spoke with R-E staff writer Ruth Nerhaugen about their tragedy. The front-page story appeared the day of Cam's visitation, and it generated widespread, positive response.

Primary credit goes to the Goetzes who were willing to share their story, and to Bob Glasenapp and his staff at Goodhue County Mental Health Center who helped us hook up with the family. It's instructive as well for readers to know the sensitivity with which we approached the story.

## First contact

Representatives of Goodhue County Mental Health Center made the original contact to discuss a way to share with readers – primarily friends of Cam Goetz -- signs of depression and suicide. It's fairly routine for schools to bring in counselors to talk with students in the aftermath of a tragedy. But this occurred during the summer with no organized opportunity to meet with Cam's peers. Counselors were available Monday afternoon for a brief period at First Covenant Church, but the need was evident for broader distribution of the message.

The R-E's policy on suicide is often much debated – the fact that we always report the cause of death. That is our policy for reporting all deaths by other than natural causes.

## Sensitive to family

It's equally important, we believe, if we can be a partner in presenting information that may prevent copycat occurrences. We were sensitive to the fact that we could not write such an article without referring to Cam Goetz's death, and we did not want to run the article without the family's awareness – even blessing.

A Goodhue County staff member, who also is a friend of the Goetzes, made the contact and the family agreed to the interview.

The timing of the article played another role, too. We intentionally published it the day of the visitation with the thought that it would help friends visiting the family understand the illness that led to his death – depression. More than one person told us that they initially did not intend to go to the funeral home, but changed their minds after the article appeared.

The article prompted others to urge the R-E to do more of this kind of stories. And we have done articles on the tendency of people to go into depression around holidays such as Christmas. But it was the circumstances – the ability to link advice from the Mental Health Center to a specific incident – that made this story so powerful.

"Suffering without meaning is a tragedy," Bob and Susan Goetz said last week. We thank them for openly talking about the loss of their son and for helping people to better understand the circumstances.

Too often the media gets portrayed as sticking a microphone in people's faces and asking them to react at a time of tragedy. The Cam Goetz story shows it is possible and far more constructive for all involved to work as partners – rather than adversaries – in writing stories about human tragedy.

## **Column: Goetzes turn tragedy into a positive forum**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

By Jim Pumarlo  
Editor

The Republican Eagle will present its top local stories of 2002 in a commemorative edition next week. The event rated No. 1 was an overwhelming selection: the financial challenges facing the Red Wing School District. The aftermath of the failed levy referendum this month underscores that the teachers' strike left many divisions; the community faces a long healing process.

Included in the top 10 stories is an especially noteworthy one, however. The suicide of Cam Goetz – son of Bob and Susan and the sister of Steph – resonated not only among his family and friends, but throughout Red Wing. The Goetzes lost another son, Brandon, five years earlier in a car accident.

The Goetzes shared Cam's story in an attempt to help the community address a hidden problem that affects many people. As they said in August, "Suffering without meaning is a tragedy."

They underscored the importance of talking openly about their son's illness – depression. Their public response to dealing with a personal tragedy prompted an outpouring of community support.

The Goetz story was important for another reason. Cam Goetz's death put the spotlight on a significant social issue. The story also did not end with his death. The Goetz family used a portion of memorial gifts to sponsor a forum on depression and suicide. More than 500 people came to the Sheldon Theatre to listen to a program arranged with the help of the Goodhue County chapter of the National Association of Mental Illness.

The elections had just finished which changed Minnesota's political landscape. The community was embroiled in the teachers' strike. But residents put those things aside to talk about a "silent" illness. The forum emphasized the need to address social issues is just as important as the attention paid to taxes and public safety if we are to maintain a healthy community.

The Goetz story sends another message that we all can strive for in 2003: to seek a balance between the good and the bad, to recognize what is positive instead of always focusing on the negative – without being Polyannas.

Bob, Susan and Steph Goetz have shown us all that it is possible to use even the worst of circumstances as a positive force for ourselves and society

## **EVERYDAY DECISIONS**

### Editorials

Give both sides of an issue a fair shake.

### Obituaries

Have written guidelines for listing survivors in free obituaries.

### Engagements, weddings, people items

Legal definition of marriage has broadened; develop policy for all types of unions.

### Proclamations

Focus on the local observation for a more meaningful story.

### Police, court reports

Report an individual's innocence with the same display as the original charges.

### Blind-sided attacks

Give the "accused" an opportunity to respond in the same story.

### Public employees

Recognize the distinction between their "public" and "private" lives.

### Diversity

Issues deserve more than token attention. Everyone should be doubling down on coverage in light of national dynamics.

### Elections

Give candidates' initial announcements similar treatment.

### Prominent citizens and families

Base news decisions on "what" and not "whom."

### Too much information?

Determine the detail necessary to educate the audience or to make the point.

### Public records

Publish records in a timely manner.

### Workplace accidents

Strike a balance between respecting privacy and squelching rumors.

### Outside media attention

Local press shine in their steady and consistent coverage. Recognize that outside may be in your community one day for the big story and be gone the next day.

## **CHECKLIST:**

### **RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The press has a right to print sensitive stories. But it also has an accompanying responsibility.

- Be prompt
- Be sensitive to placement in the newspaper.
- Be consistent/be fair.
- Be accurate.
- Be open to criticism.

### **IS IT NEWS?**

The best policy for dealing with sensitive subjects is one of consistency and fairness. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is it true?
- What is the impact of the event?
- How would you treat the story if you were the subject?
- How would you justify your decision to readers if questioned?
- Is the report fair?
- Is it a public or strictly private issue?
- Will the story make a difference?
- Will the truth quell rumors?

Afterward, talk over the decision with staff. Find out their reaction and community response.

Always have the same person communicate the newspaper's policy.

### **GAINING ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

If you're denied access to information, don't simply accept the rejection. Here are some guidelines for common situations. Some are grounded in law; others are simply ways of getting sensitive information that may not be readily accessible.

- Know your rights under the Freedom of Information Act.
- Make certain officials cite the law which allows them to withhold information. It's not good enough that they are uncomfortable with releasing information.
- Present your case based on the spirit of the law as well as the letter of the law.
- If sources will release information based on keeping their names confidential, guarantee confidentiality and get at least one other source to confirm information.
- Speak to the importance of quelling rumors by getting the facts straight from the source.
- Use others in the industry as a resource.



## **PURSUE SECOND-DAY STORIES**

### Premise

Follow-up stories are routine in everyday news coverage, especially when it comes to reporting on government meetings. The value of second-day stories might be greatest when pursuing sensitive stories, and indeed underscores the need for covering these stories in the first place.

### Parameters

- Spot news often prompts charges of sensational coverage. Seize the opportunity to provide coverage that looks beneath the surface of the circumstances.
- Broaden the conversation with individuals beyond those associated with the original news event.
- Explore the sidebar issues.
- Take the pulse of the community buzz. What are people talking about?
- Develop informal networks. Consider the five Bs – bars, beauticians, barbers, butchers and bakeries.
- Use the opportunity to reveal and reinforce facts and squelch rumors.
- Distinguish your coverage from that of “outside” media.
- Consider avenues for the editorial page – local editorials as well as guest commentaries including point/counterpoint.

### Consistency

Sensitive and challenging stories typically pose opportunities and challenges for follow-up coverage. It’s important to explore and evaluate all avenues. Some of this will occur spontaneously. Convene a formal brainstorming session, if possible.

### Communication

Explore and explain follow-up stories with your readers in a column. Preview your next steps, if appropriate. Don’t be afraid to solicit their ideas. Second-day stories serve a public purpose. They provide solid and substantive content for your newspaper. More important, they provide value and a service for readers.

## **DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEWS SOURCES**

### Premise

The press too often is characterized as an adversary with news sources. That doesn't have to be the norm. Newsrooms should be aggressive in their pursuit of news. At the same time, editors and reporters should be diligent in developing relationships with newsmakers who can be uncooperative in sharing "all the news."

### Parameters

- Introduce yourself. You'll have the greatest success in seeking information – especially if it's unflattering news from a source's perspective – if you have established a relationship.
- Initiate coverage early. Don't wait to be approached. Create a master calendar. It gives you an opportunity to explain the hows and whys of coverage and should result in more substantive stories.
- Lay the groundwork. Unprepared reporters are susceptible to producing stories filled with omissions and misinformation. Proper preparation will result in more meaningful stories for readers. Local government budgets provide an excellent example. The numbers can take months to prepare and tweak, yet many reporters don't see the finished product until the meeting where it is adopted.
- Share "after hours" contact information – cell phones, etc., - with key newsmakers, especially law enforcement personnel.
- Entertain submissions of stories and photos. Staffs cannot be everywhere, especially in these days of diminished resources. Be careful that this is not interpreted as a free-for-all; develop and publicize ground rules.
- Localize state and national stories. This practice produces solid news stories and is a great way to give attention to local issues on a regular basis.
- Provide other avenues such as guest columns. A word of caution: Be sure the columns are more than a PR pitch. These contributions can complement and supplement coverage, especially at newspapers strapped for resources.
- Seek opportunities to say "yes" to requests for coverage that serve the dual purpose of improving relationships with news sources and providing substantive news content.

### Consistency

Newsmakers must learn to volunteer the bad news and the good news. And newspapers – even in their roles as government watchdogs – must be as receptive to covering the good news as they are to digging for the bad news.

### Communication

Don't be misled. Despite your best efforts, relationships with newsmakers won't always be rosy. Editors still will have legitimate reason to reject some requests, and reporters still will confront resistance in their pursuit of "bad" news.

## Column: Public salaries go with territory

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

**By Jim Pumarlo**  
**Editor**

Joe Johnson's thoughtful letter on this page set the editors to scratching their heads. Is it truly in the public interest to list the salaries of local government workers by name?

Johnson says he expects a certain "nakedness" as a city employee, but can't the Republican Eagle's quest for public information be curbed at least a little in the interest of the privacy of individuals? Why not, for example, list the salary of the city chemist by position alone, eliminating the name of the job-holder?

Moreover, shouldn't the R-E be consistent and print the salaries of every public employee – union as well as non-union – at all levels of government?

We don't think the public is served by printing only titles and salaries. Secondly, the ideal situation would be to print all salaries. Both those are quick answers, and Johnson's letter deserves a more thorough exploration. Withholding names from the positions is at cross-purposes with our mission to provide information. In our book, that's nearly as bad as giving misinformation.

There are other complexities, such as being selective in whom we identify. We believe most people – except the individuals themselves – agree certain salaries should be published. For the city, the obvious ones include the council administrator, police chief, fire chief, city clerk, city engineer and public works director. In addition to holding supervisory positions, they in many ways participate in shaping city policy – how our tax dollars are spent.

No easy answers

If the R-E is selective in printing salaries, where should we draw the line? It's a difficult task. For example:

Print salaries of elected officials only. Is it fair to cite the county sheriff, who is elected, but not the city police chief, who is appointed?

Print salaries above a certain level. What's a fair figure - \$20,000, \$25,000, \$30,000? It's far too subjective.

Print only supervisors. Again, it's too subjective. The standard also is flawed in cases where a non-supervisory employee – due to overtime – is paid more than a supervisor. Should those salaries be revealed, too?

One reason to print government salaries is to allow private employers to size themselves against the public sector. For the employee, the information might be a bargaining chip. For the employer, it shows how tough the competition is.

Given the arguments, the issue boils down to consistency: Either the R-E prints all the salaries or none at all. If we had the resources, we'd treat all government employees alike. For instance, is it right to print just school administrators' salaries – and not those of the 200-plus teachers whose incomes comprise 70 percent of the school budget?

Strive for consistency

Johnson presents an excellent challenge: The R-E should be as thorough with county or school wages as those for the city. We all must realize, though, that any policy will be second-guessed, and no system will be perfect.

Finally, publishing the wages falls under the category of protecting the rights the press has earned. Frequently, the R-E – and the press overall – is criticized for being a strong advocate of public information. There's a good reason for our effort. Each time public officials get a small opening, they take the proverbial mile. Consider two events of the past year:

Randy Erickson, former managing director of the municipal auditorium, was placed on probation in secrecy. The agenda – minus the personnel matter – was routine, so the R-E did not attend. The board took action and made no public disclosure until the issue was pressed.

Three members of a county board held an unscheduled session without announcing the intent to deal with social services issues, then quietly terminated the county's contract with its longtime mental health provider. Some other commissioners didn't even know about it until the issue surfaced a week later.

Johnson presents some excellent points. But just as he stands by his arguments, the R-E is resolved to keep public business public.

## **Column: R-E falls short in stabbing case**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

**By Jim Pumarlo**  
**Editor**

A reader asked Wednesday in People's Platform: "Why do some people's stories make front-page news and then when other people's side of the story comes out, it's printed on the second or third page? Is there a reason for this or a bias as far as the paper goes?"

The caller referred to Tuesday's report in which a female eyewitness to a stabbing Oct. 26 cleared the victim of any wrongdoing. The Tuesday article appeared on page 2. Her statement was significantly different than her earlier account which was published on page 1.

The female eyewitness account, in an Oct. 28 article, stated that the stabbing occurred when her fiancé, male 1, saw the victim, male 2, attempting to force her to have sex. Charges were filed against male 1. The article appeared across the front page.

The caller is correct. The follow-up should have been published on page 1 as well, especially considering the significance of the eyewitness statements. The decision to place the article on page 2 was not sufficiently thought through and fell short in terms of fair play.

Our treatment of the stabbing epitomizes the difficulty and sensitivity that all newspapers face in reporting crime, and especially in high-profile cases such as stabbings. It goes to the heart of the debate over free press/fair trial.

Criminal complaints, by law, are public records. It seems appropriate to publish some of the details that substantiate the charges leveled against a person.

The difficulty lies in the fact that complaints often contain no rebuttal from the accused. That may not come until the trial or negotiations between attorneys, which could be months after the incident.

The Red Wing stabbing was even more complex. First, the victim, male 2, did not face charges, but admittedly was put in a poor light by the initial account. Secondly, he was hospitalized at the same time the charges were filed against male 1 and could not give a statement to police.

Several people called when we first reported the stabbing, saying the report was one-sided. We declined publishing their comments. It is our policy not to "try" a case in the newspaper.

But we assured them that once the victim, male 2, gave a statement to the police, we'd print his side of the story.

We've yet to receive the victim's version of the incident, but obviously the statement of the female eyewitness was powerful. It deserved more prominent placement.

We've apologized to the victim, assuring him that as the case progresses and the facts are released, we'll give those articles proper attention.

## **Column: Our definition of business news**

*Red Wing Republican Eagle*

**By Jim Pumarlo**  
**Editor**

A restaurant gets new owners. That's news. The same restaurant sends out a press release about the popularity of its special home-made soup. That's an ad.

An investment firm relocates. That's news. The company announces a new line of annuities. That's an ad.

A retailer opens in town. That's news. The same merchant sends press releases about grand openings and successive anniversary sales. Those are ads.

All of these examples occurred in Red Wing and at nearly every other community newspaper. They point out one of the biggest misunderstandings which the R-E deals with daily: what's legitimately a news story, and what's strictly a promotion that should be advertised.

Weekly the R-E gets besieged with requests for "business news." Nearly every day some company promotes its wares through the mail. In almost every case, the advertising agencies know that what they're trying to pass off as a press release rightfully belongs in advertising columns.

All sorts of gimmicks

Agencies entice newspapers in every size and shape – literally. Product samples routinely are delivered. At the R-E, most of these wind up alongside the accompanying press release in the wastebasket.

The R-E's business news is designated for exactly that – news. We report on new businesses, key changes such as a new location, new management or major remodeling, or a significant development in operations.

But we do not routinely report on changes which relate directly to marketing strategies. A new department, added product lines, internal staff reorganization, expanded services, or reoccurring sales promotions with customer giveaways all properly fall under advertising.

Business briefs

Many business items are grouped under our "Business Briefs." Often these will be reports of employees attending seminars, achieving continuing education credits or professional designations, or being recognized for professional achievements.

We think that's important to share. It's similar to many of our "People" items which report of young men and women in the military service, or people being recognized for service to community organizations.

For businesses that do submit news releases, here's an important tip: Write the information in layman's language. Too often these items contain terminology and abbreviations more appropriate for a professional journal. The information may make perfect sense to fellow office workers, but – if left untouched by editors – the items would be Greek to most readers.

Editors often are stumped by the releases and have to make follow-up calls to make the message understandable to readers.

#### Independent departments

The news and advertising departments operate closely – but independently – at the Republican Eagle. If customers purchase an ad, they should expect professional and courteous service and a good return on their investments. But there is no link between how much advertisers spend with the R-E and how much news coverage their corresponding businesses receive.

Just as advertisers are entitled to courteous service by their R-E advertising representatives, they should expect and receive from the editor a courteous and clear explanation of the newspaper's separation between news and advertising.

## **JIM PUMARLO**

Community newspapers, at their best, are stewards of their communities. The news columns are a blend of stories that people like to read and stories they should read. The advertising columns promote and grow local commerce. And the editorial pages are a marketplace of ideas.

Jim Pumarlo understands that energized newspapers are at the foundation of energized communities. His message is straightforward: Community newspapers – whether delivering information in the print or on digital platforms – must focus on local news if they are to remain relevant to their readers and advertisers.

His seminars and training workshops are practical and interactive, including handouts that participants can use to tailor policies and procedures to their operations. In addition to his standard menu of seminars, he works with newspapers to provide custom training for their needs, including individual writing critiques.

He worked nearly 27 years at daily newspapers in International Falls and Red Wing, Minn., the last 21 years as editor at Red Wing. He resigned in 2003 and served 16 years as director of communications and media relations at the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, the state’s largest business advocacy organization.

He released a book in 2005, “Bad News and Good Judgment: A Guide to Reporting on Sensitive Issues in a Small-Town Newspaper.” His second book, Votes and Quotes: A Guide to Outstanding Election Campaign Coverage,” was released in 2007. His third book, “Journalism Primer: A Guide to Community News Coverage for Beginning and Veteran Journalists,” was released in 2011.

He remains involved in the Minnesota Newspaper Association as a member of its Journalism Education and Legislative committees. He is a former member of the Minnesota News Media Institute, the training arm of the Minnesota Newspaper Association. He served on the hearing panel for the Minnesota News Council, which promoted fair, vigorous and trusted journalism by engaging the news media and the public in examining standards of fairness.



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