

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican Co-Publisher

Sunday, Feb. 1 will be a sad day for newspaper readers in outstate Nebraska. Sunday will mark the final day that the Omaha World-Herald, previously Nebraska's only statewide paper, will stop all outstate delivery in Nebraska west of Kearney.

As a newspaper man myself, the World-Herald has been part of my daily routine dating back to my years in college in the late 1970s. Right now, I still can't imagine quite what my mornings are going to be without the World-Herald on my doorstep each day.

I especially looked forward to the Saturday and Sunday issues, when I could lie in my bed and take it all in—state news, national news, world news, and of course, Husker sports.

If it's any consolation, we aren't the only newspaper followers who have been hit by this economic crisis.

The Rocky Mountain News, one of Denver's oldest businesses and Colorado's oldest newspaper, is up for sale. If they can't find a buyer, they will just close the doors.

In Detroit, the Detroit Free Press and Detroit News will cut its home delivery drastically in March, delivering only on certain days. They will print an abbreviated paper each day for the racks but will guide readers to their on-line edition.

Daily newspapers in metro and regional areas across the country are struggling for their lives and the Omaha World-Herald is no different.

The time had come for them to make a painful decision to cease delivery in this part of the state—shedding an expense that probably drained close to \$2 million from their bottom line each year.

While readers in outstate Nebraska aren't happy about the decision, what would they do if faced with a similar situation that was draining cash from their pockets with little return?

Circulation is a valuable aspect of a newspaper's revenue sources but the major revenue stream comes from advertising. It's likely that many of the World-Herald's advertisers got little to no benefit from getting their ad in front of readers in Imperial, Sidney or Scottsbluff.

I know the management team at the World-Herald and believe me, this was not a decision they wanted to make or one that came easy. And while they are no longer circulating in this region, the management team assured me they will still continue to cover ALL of Nebraska.

People who want the World-Herald can now subscribe by mail or subscribe to the online edition.

I have had dozens of people ask me what we can do. Frankly, with the World-Herald situation—very little.

However, we're not out of options. The North Platte Telegraph, which is owned by the World-Herald is reaching out to Imperial. They are already delivering their paper on Saturday and Sunday mornings, with same-day mail delivery the other days. If demand warrants, they will likely increase home delivery to six days a week. (They don't publish on Monday).

As a member of the World-Herald organization, they have access to many of the same stories we read in the World-Herald. As a new subscriber, I have already found increased content in their paper to help fill the void.

Their publisher told me this week they are trying to run more state news and sports with less emphasis on national and world news and sports.

When you think about it, isn't that the kind of news we looked to the World-Herald for anyway? So, to all those who asked me what they could do, my answer would be to try the Telegraph—nothing ventured, nothing gained. (And no, I'm not getting a kickback for writing this. I just feel this option best serves our community.)

Plus, I couldn't finish this column with saying thanks for the local support our Johnson Publications papers receive, both in the form of subscribers and advertisers. We believe there is no other paper or entity that can cover your community better and help it grow than "your" local newspaper can. And we aim to keep it that way!