

***By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican Co-Publisher***

For the past 18 months or so, there's been a blood bath going on in the newspaper industry. Blindsided by a worsening economy, stalwarts in the industry, such as the 150-year old Rocky Mountain News, have closed their doors.

Major newspapers across the country in places like Boston, Minneapolis, Detroit, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Miami struggle for survival. After 146 years, The Seattle Post-Intelligencer went the way of the Rocky Mountain News.

We've seen it right here in our own state with the Omaha World-Herald dropping delivery to much of western Nebraska, much to the chagrin of subscribers who've been faithful readers for years.

Fortunately, the community newspaper business continues to carve out its own niche in the industry through its emphasis on local news. I believe no one covers your local community better than your local newspaper—always has, always will.

□□ In my opinion, these big newspapers played a part in their own undoing. For far too long, newspaper conglomerates saw the industry not as a news business but as a money machine, squeezing out every nickel they could.

Granted, a business needs to make a profit but in the process, these large papers sacrificed their core product—the news—for their bottom line.

Obviously, the lifeblood of a community newspaper rests on the success of assisting local business owners with an advertising medium to make their businesses successful as well.

□□ But to do so, a newspaper must offer a large audience, which is made possible by investing the effort to best cover what's happening in your community.

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Still, a community newspaper faces some of the same challenges felt by the big boys, especially when it comes to a world who's become accustomed to instantaneous news coverage. Along with that, the growth of the Internet has altered the way we get our news today.

Even at the local level, we recognize the value of Internet, which is evidenced in the recent redesign of our web site to meet the needs of both our readers and advertisers.

In the near future, we will offer digital versions of the paper for readers who prefer to get their news that way.

But all these efforts become moot if we aren't out beating the street for the local news. That's our bread and butter.

This endeavor requires fairness and objectivity. And sometimes, we're faced with reporting local news that may be controversial or unpleasant.

We don't create the controversial or unpleasant news but it's our job to report it, which, at times, subjects us to the "kill the messenger" syndrome.

Nonetheless, it's news and in the years to come, this news becomes the history and fabric of our community.

As publishers of four area community newspapers, Johnson Publications believes in the future of our towns we serve and the people who make them great.

We remain committed to providing you with the weekly snapshot of what's happening in your community. It's this local news that's the staple of your newspaper.