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COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS IN THE DIGITAL AGE
A CASE STUDY: THE PASS CHRISTIAN, MISSISSIPPI GAZEBO GAZETTE
THESIS

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Journalism
at the Meek School of Journalism and New Media
The University of Mississippi

by

JACE R. PONDER

December 2016

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ABSTRACT

Print newspapers in the 21st century America exist in a diverse media landscape. Radio, television and online media all compete with newspapers to reach news consumers. With 24-hour cable news and the widespread adoption of the Internet, information is available to viewers and readers anytime and anywhere. Much of that information is available free of charge. Traditionally, advertising revenue has carried the costs of print news production. But as the media pie gets cut smaller and smaller, that traditional model is failing to support print newspapers. In the five years since 2010, America has seen a net loss of 331 newspapers and net drop in total circulation of 7,863,760.

At a time when media analysts have said the era of printing ink on dead trees is over, this study looks at how one small town community weekly newspaper continues to operate in a complex media world. Small town news outlets are insulated from some of the pressures faced by larger daily papers. By providing relentlessly local content and keeping expenses low, the Pass Christian Gazebo Gazette, which began publication in 2006 and survived the economic downturn of 2008, continues to post profits year after year.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A big thank you to Evelina Shmukler Burnett for giving me the opportunity to publish the Gazebo Gazette. She did a yeoman's work to get the newspaper started and I will forever be indebted to her.

Thank you to the faculty and staff of the Meek School of Journalism for their training, guidance and support over the years, especially thesis chair Dr. Husni and committee members Prof. Atkins and Associate Dean Mitchell.

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INTRODUCTION

Media pundits and critics regularly say “print is dead.” The statement is based on increased media competition and falling revenue at daily newspapers across the United States. However, thousands of community newspapers service small communities throughout the nation.

According to Editor & Publisher, in 2015 there were 1,338 daily print newspapers with a combined circulation of 34,900,672. Weekly newspapers totaled 5,698 with a combined circulation of 47,759,586. In other words, there are four weeklies for every daily. When niche publications (alternative, black, ethnic, gay/lesbian, Hispanic, Jewish, military, parenting, real estate, religious, senior and shoppers) are added in, the total goes up to 8,013 publications with 132,417,227 total circulation.

This thesis will look at one newspaper on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The Gazebo Gazette was founded in 2006 in a time when digital media on the Internet were predicted to sweep print publications into the dustbin of history. Ten years later the Gazebo Gazette is not only surviving, it is thriving in the small town of Pass Christian and keeps the 5,500 residents informed about local government, schools and events.

For the past three years, this writer has served as the publisher and sole full-time employee at the weekly tabloid-sized newspaper of record for Pass Christian. This case study will look at how the newspaper has evolved since its inception in May 2006 through the ten-year study period of May 2016.

The purpose of this case study is to show how one community newspaper found success in print, using a combination of focused community reportage, consistent distribution, and open interaction with readers.

BACKGROUND

Since the mid-15th century, news has been printed with ink on paper in some form. Early publications were for single events, Anthony Smith writes in *The Newspaper: An International History*. Over time, single events were curated, then gathered into larger publications, and eventually into almanacs. By the time the larger publications were printed, however, the news was not so new anymore. And, Smith writes, although a collected account of affairs was “still fairly distant from the newspaper as the word is understood today, it presented most of the prerequisites.”¹ Early news publications began by covering large geographical areas in Europe. They allowed people to become acquainted with events that they would otherwise never see or experience.

By the 18th century, technology developed to build the framework for newspapers in Europe and North America. The first newspaper in America was published in Boston in September 1690. *Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestick*, published by Benjamin Harris, was a single-issue run. It was a four-page paper, with three printed pages and a blank page for readers to write current news to pass along to the next reader. The newspapers that followed in the late 17th and early 18th centuries became an intellectual forum for communities and created a sense of common interest among the settlers, who came from varied cultures, Smith writes.²

As early America fought to shrug off the yoke of English rule, the newspaper became the mouth piece of resistance. John Peter Zenger became a symbol of that resistance when he was charged with libel in 1735 for critiquing the local governor. Other publishers and editors followed in Zenger’s footsteps and used the press as a tool for social and political change in the years leading up to the American revolution.

1 Smith, Anthony. *The Newspaper: An International History*. pg. 13

2 *Ibid.* pg. 81

After independence from Britain was achieved, newspapers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries transformed into partisan publications with the goal of promoting their political beliefs.¹

Dr. Gerald Baldasty argues in his essay “The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Modern American Journalism” that partisan publishers saw readers as voters. “Partisan advocacy was the central content of these newspapers, and what we would call editorials today constituted the form of newspaper writing.” Partisanship was deemed a badge of honor and integrity, Baldasty writes.²

He expands on his thesis in The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century, which documents the change from a partisan press to a more neutral, general interest press, which attracted larger circulations. Advertisers flocked to large circulations, and publishers began to see readers as consumers to be sold to marketers.

Newspapers of the early-19th century were dependent on the party they aligned with, often receiving patronage or printing contracts. Political parties used newspapers to relay information from rallies and speeches to readers who could not attend in person. The press brought the rally to the readers, and newspapers became vital for political parties to communicate with their followers.

Historian Robert Remini is quoted for writing that “perhaps the single most important accomplishment” of Andrew Jackson’s party in the 1820s was the “creation of a vast, nationwide newspaper system.” As Jacksonian newspapers became established in small towns everywhere, anti-Jacksonian papers appeared as well, fostering a network of competing newspapers. Editors saw readers as voters to be wooed and mobilized to vote for a particular party.³

Neutrality was frowned upon during this time. Baldasty quotes from a New York paper published in August 1832:

“...precisely what we most of all things abhor and detest, to wit, a neutral paper. It pretends to be all things to all men. Now we would wish to be civil to the editor, but we can never consent to an exchange with any such paper, for we verily think they should all, one and all, be thrown out of the pale of the press. If we are asked why, we answer

¹ Smith. pg. 80

² Baldasty, Gerald. “The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Modern American Journalism.” Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society. Vol. 100 pg. 409 January 1, 1991

³ Baldasty. *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*. pg. 25

that the editor must be doing violence to his opinions, or else he had none to abuse; and in either case, he is hardly entitled to the common civilities of his typographic brethren.”⁴

By mid-century, Baldasty writes that parties began to institutionalize operations and bring party propaganda within. Political patronage began to disappear, forcing newspaper publishers to seek new forms of revenue. As the political revenue stream dried up, the partisan stance of newspapers began to change. In fact, James Gordon Bennett’s New York Herald proudly defined its editorial line in 1835 to “endeavor to record facts on every public and proper subject, stripped of verbiage and coloring, with comments when suitable, just, independent, fearless and good-tempered.”⁵

Baldasty writes that America became more urbanized during this time as the industrial revolution began. The country’s population was drawn to urban centers and the lure of manufacturing jobs. As cities grew, newspapers expanded their coverage to arts, theatre and leisure activities to attract a larger readership. The New York Herald claimed a circulation of 51,000 by the 1840s.⁶

The industrial revolution’s mass production and mass distribution created a need for mass marketing. “The tremendous increase in production, delivered via a far-flung distribution network, would have amounted to little if consumers had not known about the vast new supply of goods available. Indeed, marketing was an essential complement to mass production and mass distribution.”⁷ Newspapers served as the medium to bring consumers to producers. By the turn of the century, newspapers became seen as primarily a business with sole aim of profitability. News became seen as a product to package and sell to attract the largest audience for marketers. Baldasty argues the modern journalistic ideal of objectivity is derived from financial concern.⁸ Through content analysis of nonmetropolitan newspapers published before 1830, Baldasty found the publications contained over 70 percent political content and 14 percent general interest. In 1897, political content dropped to 23 percent and general interest rose to 27 percent. The change in content illustrates the move of publishers away from the party press and to an

⁴ Baldasty. pg. 25

⁵ Ibid. pg. 47

⁶ Ibid. pg. 50

⁷ Ibid. pg. 53

⁸ Ibid. pg. 8

independent business model.⁹ “Rather than wooing *voters*, many newspapers had come to woo *consumers*, whose numbers would woo advertisers.”¹⁰

Sociologist Alfred McClung Lee estimated newspapers received 44 percent of their revenue from advertising in 1879. By 1899, advertising brought in the majority of revenue at nearly 55 percent. The arrangement set the stage for the advertising-dependent business model that served newspapers throughout the 20th century.¹¹

For the first two decades of the 20th century, newspapers were society’s main source of information. While newspapers continued to see large profit margins from advertising, technological innovations throughout the century broke their monopoly on information. The advent of radio broadcasting in the 1920s and heavy adoption of television use in the 1950s, brought increased competition to the newspaper industry and led to consolidation. Between 1960 and 1980, Gannett Company purchased over 50 newspapers in America.¹² In the 1990s, the Internet was made commercially available and with it came the promise of instant access to information, any time, any where. Newspapers, especially large metro dailies, experienced declining readership as the audience moved from a print product in favor of broadcast and online products, that are often available free of charge.¹³

In a 2016 study, the Pew Research Center found that print newspapers are the least often used platform by news consumers. Television (57%) is the most often used followed by online (38%) and radio (25%). Print newspapers are used by 20 percent of Americans, a rate that is a third of TV use and half of online use. The Pew study also reported that TV is the most preferred platform, followed by the web, with radio and print trailing behind.¹⁴

⁹ Ibid. pg. 123-4

¹⁰ Ibid. pg. 129 (italics in original)

¹¹ Lee, Alfred McClung. *The Daily Newspaper in America: The Evolution of a Social Instrument*. The McMillan Company, New York. 1937. p. 322

¹² Patel, Aleesha. “The Survival of Print in the Digital Age of Communication.” Thesis. pg 6

¹³ Mitchell, Amy, et al. “The Modern News Consumer.” <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/pathways-to-news/> Published July 7, 2016.

¹⁴ Pew Research Center. “State of the News Media 2016” <http://www.journalism.org/media-indicators/newspapers-circulation-makeup-by-platform/> Published June 15, 2016.

The florescence of the Internet has led many media pundits to say “Print is dead.” The vision of the future of news consisted of a mixture of broadcast and online media, with the personalized possibilities of the Internet taking the majority of readers. In 1950, the Newspaper Association of America reported a total advertising income of \$2 billion for American newspapers. By 2000, advertising revenue hit a high-water mark of \$48.7 billion. Although print advertising has since dropped by more than half to \$22.8 billion in 2010, online advertising has hardly made up the difference. Then NAA reported a mere \$3 billion in online ad revenue nationwide in 2010.¹⁵

Industrywide, “the shift to replace losses in print ad revenue with new digital revenue is taking longer and proving more difficult than executives want and at the current rate most newspapers continue to contract with alarming speed,” according to a 2012 study by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism.¹⁶ The report goes on to say print advertising is declining about \$7 for every \$1 in digital advertising gain. Looking ahead, the study participants suggest reducing daily printing to a few days a week and raising subscription prices so that circulation revenue increases to as much as half of total revenue.

Two years after that report was published, Pew published a study on the revenue structure of the media landscape. To make up for the loss in print circulation revenue, many papers increased subscription and single copy rates.¹⁷ The National Newspaper Association reported that the average cost of a one-week subscription to a daily newspaper was \$3.66 in 2008. It rose to \$4.50 in 2011 and \$5.74 in 2014.¹⁸ The Los Angeles Times raised its single-copy price 50 percent to \$1.50, and the New York Times raised its single-copy price 25 percent to \$2.50. Around one-third of the daily newspapers in America implemented digital pay scales. While circulation began to increase as a percentage of total revenue, advertising still

¹⁵ Newspaper Revenue. <http://www.naa.org/Trends-and-Numbers/Newspaper-Revenue.aspx>

¹⁶ Rosentiel, Tom. “The Search for a New Business Model.” <http://www.journalism.org/2012/03/05/search-new-business-model/> Published March 5, 2012

¹⁷ Holcomb, Jesse & Mitchell, Amy. “The Growing Importance of Audience Revenue.” <http://www.journalism.org/2014/03/26/the-growing-importance-of-audience-revenue/> Published March 26, 2014

¹⁸ Editor & Publisher. October 2015. pg. 20

accounted for over two-thirds of total revenue in 2014.¹⁹ The Pew study concludes that “audience-driven revenue growth does not necessarily signify that more people are paying for news. Rather, the data suggest that, in aggregate, more revenue is being squeezed out of a shrinking—or at least flat—base of paying consumers.”²⁰

As the an online presence for newspapers becomes an industry norm, many are looking at ways to monetize readers. Traditionally, Internet users have expected free access to information. If one website limited access, readers would go to another website where it was free. In 1997, the Wall Street Journal launched the first newspaper paywall. For \$50 a year, subscribers gained access to WSJ.com. In August 2003, the Los Angeles Times started charging \$4.95 a month for access to the entertainment section. The paywall was dropped in May 2005 after a reported 97 percent drop in traffic to the content. In 2005, the New York Times implemented a \$49.95 annual paywall. It lasted two years before the Times removed it. The paywall returned in January 2011 as a metered paywall, where users are allowed access to a limited amount of free stories before being required to pay. A more recent development occurred in April 2015, when the Winnipeg Free Press launched a new paywall charging 21¢ a story or \$13.47 per month.²¹ An International News Media Association study published November 2014 found that metered paywalls are more successful than hard paywalls in terms of retention rates.²² Another study, by MECLABS Institute, indicates that 41 percent of news consumers are not completely opposed to paid digital subscriptions, and 19 percent are open to buying in. “Exclusive content is the primary motivation for subscribers,” the study concludes.²³ Adriana Young, writing for Editor & Publisher, said “the key to retaining and gaining

¹⁹ Holcomb & Mitchell. “The Revenue Picture for American Journalism and How It Is Changing” <http://www.journalism.org/2014/03/26/the-revenue-picture-for-american-journalism-and-how-it-is-changing/> Published March 26, 2014

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Young, Adreana. “The Next Generation of Subscription Programs” Editor & Publisher. May 2015. pg. 44

²² Ibid.

²³ “41% of U.S. news consumers could be persuaded to purchase digital newspaper subscriptions.” Publisher’s Auxiliary. May 2016. pg 9

audiences and paid subscribers might not be how readers are getting their news, but, a more obvious answer is what they are getting out of it: the value of the content.”²⁴

Taking a closer look at the revenue picture of one example, the New York Times continues to see its print advertising revenue fall, according to its 2015 annual report. In 2015, print revenue fell by \$40 million. Online advertising rose by \$15 million in the same time period. But the company ended 2015 with \$662 million in advertising revenue, nearly \$25 million less than 2014’s total of \$638 million.

On the circulation side at the New York Times, the company saw a \$9 million increase in 2015 to \$836 million. “Circulation revenues rose as revenues from the Company’s digital subscription initiatives and the 2015 increase in home-delivery prices at The New York Times more than offset a decline in print copies sold.”²⁵

Despite an increase in both online advertising and online subscriptions, the New York Times still saw an overall drop in revenue in 2015.

British journalist turned professor George Brock heads the graduate school of journalism at City University London. In his 2013 book *Out of Print* he writes about newspapers and journalism in the digital age. He talks about the decline of newspapers and how journalism itself is struggling to find its way in the 21st century. He compares the state of journalism at the turn of the century to a game of soccer. Many media companies were like a youth soccer team with every player chasing the ball on the field. Experienced players know how to hold their positions and move to where the ball may go next, which gives them a better chance of scoring. He writes that the number of experienced players is small but growing and a successful digital journalism model will be found.²⁶

However, for the time being, media companies can not sit on the sidelines and wait for the new model to prove itself. They must continue to be in business until that model comes along. The disruption

²⁴ Young.

²⁵ “The New York Times Company Reports 2015 Fourth-Quarter and Full-Year Results. http://s1.q4cdn.com/156149269/files/doc_news/2016/Press-Release-12.27.2015-r110-to-Q4.pdf

²⁶ Brock, George. *Out of Print: Newspapers, Journalism and the Business of News in the Digital Age*. Kogan Page Limited, London and Philadelphia. 2013.

of the Internet forces business to preside over the old business model while the new business model becomes substantial.²⁷

Until that new business model develops, large papers are cutting expenses by reducing staff and reducing coverage.²⁸ In 2008, Pew reported about 60 percent of newspapers cut staff, mainly due to financial pressures. Newspapers also reported cutting pages or reducing the space available for stories. The areas of reporting that saw the biggest cuts were international, national and business news. The areas that were growing were community news, local news, and state news. “News people are stretched to the limit trying to feed the seemingly insatiable appetite of the web for content—immediately. The enormity of its impact on the industry—both real and potential—is hard to overestimate,” the study concludes.

With financial pressures leading to cutbacks, remaining employees face increased work loads. Critics have addressed the focus on speed and “newness” at the expense of accuracy and depth. In *No Time to Think*, Howard Rosenberg and Charles Feldman criticize 24-hour news cycles, bloggers, citizen journalist and practically every other aspect of journalism today. The authors stress a need for trusted gatekeepers and not opinion disguised as news.²⁹

The amount of trusted gatekeepers is decreasing, though, as corporations buy media properties in mergers and consolidations to further cut costs. Loren Ghiglione reports in the introduction to *The Buying and Selling of America’s Newspapers* that more than 88 percent of the 354 dailies sold between 1976 and 1982 were purchased by groups. In 1982, 32 of the 35 dailies sold that year were absorbed by newspaper groups.³⁰ In 2015, 70 daily papers were sold.³¹ Gannett Co. alone bought 26 dailies. Another company, Digital First Media, reportedly planned “to combine six newspapers covering the San Francisco Bay Area

²⁷ Ibid. pg. 102. (And, for more, see Clayton Christensen’s *The Innovator’s Dilemma*)

²⁸ “The Changing Newsroom.” Pew Research Center. <http://www.journalism.org/2008/07/21/the-changing-newsroom-2/> Published July 21, 2008.

²⁹ Rosenberg, Howard & Feldman, Charles. *No Time to Think*. pg. 193. pg. 209

³⁰ Ghiglione, Loren, editor. *The Buying and Selling of America’s Newspapers*. The book looks at ten daily papers bought out by newspaper groups, including the Delta Democrat-Times

³¹ Smith, Gerry. “Newspapers Gobble Each Other Up to Survive Digital Apocalypse.” <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-03-29/newspapers-gobble-each-other-up-to-survive-digital-apocalypse> Published March 29, 2016

into two and cut 20 percent of the staff. After the cuts, the company will have 160 people covering 160 towns across 5,000 square miles.”³²

While the research seems to paint a bleak future with falling revenue, declining workforces and shrinking ownership, the Newspaper Association of America (NAA), a nonprofit organization representing nearly 2,000 newspapers and their multiplatform businesses in the United States and Canada, found that about 70 percent of respondents read a newspaper in print or online, indicating there is an appetite for news.³³ The organization also found that newspaper content is 50 percent more likely to be retweeted than other local news sources.³⁴

The majority of the research presented so far focuses on daily papers. Research regarding non-dailies does not get as much attention. Jock Lauterer notes in *Community Journalism* that weeklies outnumber dailies nearly six to one. In 2004, circulation for weeklies totaled about 109 million readers, compared to 38 million readers for large dailies.³⁵ In 2015, according to Editor & Publisher, there were 1,338 daily print newspapers with a combined circulation of 34,900,672. Community weekly newspapers totaled 5,698 with a combined circulation of 47,759,586. When niche publications (alternative, black, ethnic, gay/lesbian, Hispanic, Jewish, military, parenting, real estate, religious, senior and shoppers) are added in, the total goes up to 8,013 publications with 132,417,227 total circulation. In the five years between 2010 and 2015, dailies saw a total drop of 11,376,998 in circulation. During the same time frame, community weeklies saw an increase of 3,513,238 in circulation.³⁶

With such an overwhelming presence, the community weekly papers that service small towns and communities throughout America deserve more attention.

The National Newspaper Association (NNA) is a trade group that represents 2,200 smaller newspapers. According to several studies published in *Pub Aux*, NNA’s monthly magazine distributed to

³² Ibid.

³³ “Trends and Numbers” Newspaper Association of America. <http://www.naa.org/Trends-and-Numbers/Readership.aspx>

³⁴ Editor & Publisher. January 2016. pg. 21

³⁵ Lauterer, Jock. *Community Journalism*. pg. 5

³⁶ Editor & Publisher Yearbook International Year Book 2010. Editor & Publisher Newspaper Databook 2016.

members, residents of small towns depend on print newspapers for civic information, business and restaurant information and local news. One study found that 78 percent of respondents relied on community newspapers for local news and information, whether in print or online.³⁷ A related study found that two-thirds (67%) of small town residents read a newspaper at least one day a week.³⁸ The same study found seven out of ten (71%) readers agreed that newspaper advertising inserts helped them make better purchasing decisions.

The Pew Center has also published several reports about how small town residents get news. One study found 72 percent of adults are attached to following local news, and local newspapers are the source they rely on for getting news.³⁹ Another study in 2012 found “small town Americans prefer the local newspaper for a long list of information-including local weather, crime, community events, schools, arts and culture, taxes, housing, zoning, local government and social services.”⁴⁰ Residents of small towns also worry about what would happen if the local newspaper went out of business, which may explain why small town and rural residents are more willing to pay for news than urban residents.⁴¹

One reason residents of small towns depend on community papers is the focus on local government.⁴² In suburban markets, 75 percent of government news coverage appeared in news print. The remaining coverage was on television, radio or online blogs.

Democracy depends on the distribution of public facts, Martin and Hansen argue in Newspapers of Record in a Digital Age. Published in the late 1990s when the Internet was gaining popularity and

³⁷ “NNA survey: Small town residents depend on their community paper” <http://nnaweb.org/resources?articleTitle=nna-survey-small-town-residents-depend-on-their-community-paper--1391440971--738--industry-research> Published February 3, 2014.

³⁸ “Two-thirds of residents in small towns and cities read community newspapers” <http://www.nnaweb.org/resources?articleTitle=two-thirds-of-residents-in-small-towns-and-cities-read-community-newspapers--1391441142--739--industry-research> Published February 3, 2014.

³⁹ “72% of Americans Follow Local News Closely” Pew Research Center. <http://www.journalism.org/2012/04/12/72-americans-follow-local-news-closely/> Published April 12, 2012.

⁴⁰ “How People Get Local News and Information in Different Communities” Pew Research Center. <http://www.journalism.org/2012/09/26/how-people-get-local-news-and-information-different-communities/#> Published September 26, 2012.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Media Coverage of City Governments” Pew Research Center. <http://www.journalism.org/2010/07/29/media-coverage-city-governments/> Published July 29, 2010.

becoming increasingly accessible, the two journalism professors looked at some of the issues with newspapers going out of print.

Newspapers are a substitute for face-to-face contacts and serve as the official record of events.⁴³ The regular publication of news allows residents to feel like they know what is going on in their community, the authors write. The goings-on of local governments allow constituents to be informed about what their elected officials are doing and planning. Once in print, news reports become the authoritative version of events, the “archival chronicle,” the “community memory bank.”⁴⁴

A problem with online news, they argue, is that a publication is never in its final form. It can always be modified, corrected or amended.

Another issue involves legal notices. State statutes define which print newspapers can publish legal notices as a ‘newspaper of record.’ Martin and Hansen note that “newspaper of record” refers to both a publication’s status to publish legal notices and to a publication’s role as the first draft of history used by archivists and historians.⁴⁵ Legal notices inform communities what the government is planning to do or has done. The notices also provide a revenue stream for newspapers. To a historian, a newspaper of record is regularly published in a community, providing an insight into how the community functioned and what the community found important during any given period.

“Record newspapers...are intended to facilitate an array of community needs for comprehensive, authoritative, reliable reports on government activity” needed by the legal community, historians, and archivists. Newspapers themselves use back issues as source material for future stories, they write.⁴⁶

In Mississippi, to be considered a legal newspaper, a publication must be general circulation sent to paid subscribers; must not contain more than 75 percent advertising in half of its issues; be printed for

⁴³ Martin, Shannon E. and Hansen, Kathleen A. *Newspapers of Record in a Digital Age: From Hot Type to Hot Link*. Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT. 1998. pg 4

⁴⁴ Ibid. pg 6

⁴⁵ Ibid. 1

⁴⁶ Ibid. pg 121

at least 12 months; issued from a known office of publication; formed of printed sheets; and contain general interest news.⁴⁷ Online newspapers are not addressed in current state law.

In Mississippi, 102 newspapers serve the state with a total circulation of 613,055, according to Editor & Publisher.⁴⁸ There were 19 dailies with a circulation of 205,006 in 2015; a decrease of 3 papers and nearly 90,000 circulation in the five years since 2010. For Mississippi weeklies in 2015, there were 83 publications with a circulation of 408,049, an increase of three publications and nearly 41,000 circulation growth since 2010. The Mississippi Press Association reports 108 member papers with a total circulation of 503,415 as of September 2013.

When critics say print is dead, it seems they are focused on Wall Street and ignoring Main Street. Large, publicly-traded newspapers are feeling the squeeze from increased competition. Community weeklies feel the pressure too, but the numbers indicate they are adjusting better in the current media climate. In fact, NNA columnist Kevin Slimp found that over 40 percent of locally owned papers say they are doing better financially in 2016 than they were three years ago. In the same survey, over 40 percent of publishers owned by large groups said they were worse off financially today than three years ago. “It seems, as the control of the newspaper gets closer to home, so do improvements in its health,” Slimp concludes.⁴⁹

Academic research to define community journalism has been ongoing since the 1960s when Keith Byerly coined the term and published Community Journalism. The book describes how to produce a small newspaper, taking into account all the different roles and duties required by a publisher. Byerly wrote that a “friendly neighbor” relationship between publisher and reader is one reason for community newspaper’s success. It is a “nearness to people” that separates community papers from city dailies.⁵⁰ While “nearness” is a strength, it is also a challenge because it requires publishers to be more aware of

⁴⁷ Miss. Code Ann. § 13-3-31 (2016)

⁴⁸ Editor & Publisher Newspaper Databook 2015.

⁴⁹ Slimp, Kevin. “Closer to home: Health of newspaper largely depends on ownership model” <http://www.kevinslimp.com/closer-to-home-health-of-newspaper-largely-depends-on-ownership-model-cms-283> Published February 2016

⁵⁰ Byerly, Kenneth. *Community Journalism*. Chilton Company, Philadelphia. 1961. pg 25

how their publications affect people, people who live and work and shop at the same stores as the publisher. Byerly wrote that a community newspaper:

1. Reports local news items that appear in no other newspaper.
2. Reports details of local news that are not included in stories used by other newspapers.
3. Aides local shoppers, and serves as an advertising medium for a town's merchants and other business firms.
4. Promotes local welfare and projects.
5. Gives recognition to those who work on community programs, further helping promote such projects.
6. Creates interest in government and elections, serving to make the former better and there latter more effective.
7. Stimulates thinking, particularly on local problems and projects.
8. Instructs, entertains, and informs.
9. Serves as a unifying force for the community.⁵¹

In a more recent book, also titled Community Journalism, Jock Lauterer calls community newspapers “the newspapers of the Blue Highways, off the interstates” that practice journalism with “an intensely local focus.”⁵² “At their best, community newspapers satisfy a basic human craving that most big dailies can’t touch, no matter how large their budgets - and that is the affirmation of the sense of community, a positive and intimate reflection of the sense of place, a stroke for our us-ness, our extended family-ness and our profound and interlocking connectedness.”⁵³ Lauterer adds to the definition of a community newspaper, writing it “is relentlessly local, small, a second read, accessible, leading and online.”⁵⁴

In Foundations of Community Journalism, the editors compare community journalism to the bottom of an iceberg: “[community journalism] forms the greatest bulk of journalism produced in the world, but it goes largely unnoticed by the masses compared to the ubiquitous big-media names readily recognized by society at large (The New York Times, the BBC, National Geographic, salon.com, etc.).”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Byerly. pg 5

⁵² Lauterer. pg. xviii

⁵³ Lauterer. pg 33

⁵⁴ Lauterer. pg. 42

⁵⁵ Reader, Bill & Hatcher, John, eds. *Foundations of Community Journalism*. SAGE Publications, Los Angeles. 2012. p. xiv

In fact, by Lauterer's definition which includes any newspaper with circulations below 50,000, 97 percent of all newspapers in America are community newspapers.⁵⁶

Other scholars have said community journalism could be the future of journalism, with journalists living, working, and actively participating in their community. It is a way of working that brings journalists closer to people and rejects the industry norms of objectivity and detachment.⁵⁷ "Despite a pell-mell race to go online, the newspapers that succeed will be the ones that remain close to their readers."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Lauterer. xxiii

⁵⁷ Terry, T. C. (2011). Community journalism provides model for future. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 32(1), 71-83.

⁵⁸ Terry.

HISTORY OF THE GAZEBO GAZETTE

In the small town of Pass Christian, Mississippi, the Gazebo Gazette publishes a weekly edition on Fridays. The tabloid-sized newspaper averages 16 pages with a circulation of 750, serving the coastal community with a population of 5,498, according to a 2015 estimate by the US Census.¹ Founded in 2006 by Evelina Shmukler, now Evelina Burnett, the newspaper began in the wake of Hurricane Katrina as weekly newsletter printed on 8.5x11 copy paper. As residents crawled out of the rubble left in the storm's wake, they thirsted for information: where were city services? Emergency services? When were government meetings? Where was food and water and other public assistance? Without electricity, television was not an option for many. With no local radio station, news of Pass Christian rarely got reported. Burnett's solution was the Gazebo Gazette, "a weekly newsletter for the residents and friends of Pass Christian, Mississippi."

Pass Christian is a small town covering 8.29 square miles in Harrison County on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.² To the east are the two county seats of Biloxi and Gulfport, the second largest city in the state. To the west is the town of Bay St. Louis in Hancock County; and about 50 miles beyond that, is New Orleans, Louisiana. In 2005, the population of Pass Christian was estimated to be 5,845 people. In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall to the west in Hancock County. The storm ravaged Pass Christian, killing 28 residents, destroying about 80 percent of the homes, and reducing the population by 15 percent.³ City hall, the police station, a fire station, and 96 percent of the businesses were destroyed. The bridge to Bay St. Louis was destroyed as well. Access to the Pass Christian was limited from the east

¹ "QuickFacts: Pass Christian city, Mississippi" <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2855400>

² Ibid.

³ Strout, Lawrence. *Pass Christian and the Gazebo Gazette*. p27

on Highway 90, leaving only three north-south thoroughfares. Pass Christian Mayor Leo “Chipper” McDermott said Hurricane Katrina took the city from the 21st century to the 18th century in 24 hours.¹

The Wall Street Journal assigned freelance journalist Evelina Shmukler Burnett to the Gulf Coast to report on the damage. She was a journalism graduate from Columbia University who had covered banking and insurance for the Dow Jones Wire Service in London and technology for the *Atlanta Business Chronicle*.² She arrived on the Gulf Coast September 5, 2005, and was overwhelmed by the destruction. “I found the devastation overwhelming, and I found my own role in the aftermath just as disheartening. I was surrounded by people who had lost everything—but who still took the time to speak to me, to help me—and yet I had to retain my stance of journalistic neutrality. I wanted to help them, to hug them even, and keeping this distance just wasn’t me.”³

She stayed in Mississippi for 10 days before returning home to Atlanta. The destruction and the professional detachment led her to contemplate quitting journalism. When her editor first asked her to return, she resisted. Her stories were buried online and never saw the light of day in print. She eventually gave in, on the subsequent trip, she said she fell in love in with Pass Christian.⁴

As winter approached, Burnett gathered sleeping bags and other donations and returned to Pass Christian in November. She and several friends worked at the end of December as volunteers and slept on the floor of a trailer used as a temporary library. During the stay, she and the head librarian discussed one of the town’s biggest problems: a lack of reliable information which was slowing recovery. “The local librarian told us how frustrating it was that there were people like us who wanted to help, and people who needed help, but they weren’t finding each other. So I offered my ‘services’ as a journalist to start a little

¹ Strout. pg. 25

² Saylor, Teri. “I saw firsthand the good a newspaper can do” <http://www.nnaweb.org/nna-news?articleTitle=I-saw-firsthand-the-good-a-newspaper-can-do-rsquo--1436216486--1135--community-newspaper-news> Published July 6, 2015

³ Shmukler, Evelina. “I Found My Dream Job on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi” <http://www.divinecaroline.com/life-etc/career-money/i-found-my-dream-job-gulf-coast-mississippi>

⁴ Ibid.

newsletter for Pass Christian.”⁵ An AmeriCorps*NCCC team was stationed in Pass Christian to help with recovery. The government-supported program allows young adults to perform a variety of community service projects around the nation during a ten-month commitment. Some of the Corps members stationed in Pass Christian following Katrina distributed several one-or two-page information sheets with bulleted lists of news items and phone numbers. Their work served as the prototype Burnett used to start the newspaper.⁶ Using information gathered by AmeriCorps members, she arranged to have their work sent to Atlanta to be curated, printed and shipped back to Pass Christian for distribution. Before the Gazebo Gazette, Pass Christian had not had a newspaper for 15 years since the Tarpon Beacon ended its run after more than a century.⁷

With the arrangement in place, the newspaper had to have a name. Strout reported that initially the publication was called the Pass Christian Gazette. Burnett “favored “gazette” over “tribune,” “times,” “herald” or other names for two reasons: first, many of the names used for newspapers seemed generic... Second, “gazette” sounds like the Russian word for newspaper, gazeta,” which acknowledged her Ukrainian origins. However, after the initial name was floated to several residents, then-Alderman Joe Piernas suggested Pass Christian Gazebo, since a gazebo in War Memorial Park is the city’s symbol.⁸ Through Burnett’s vision and her willingness to accept community input, the Gazebo Gazette was born. The arrangement would serve as the foundation of the newspaper for the next ten years.

Burnett made 200 copies of the of the first edition at her mother’s office in Atlanta and overnighted them to Mississippi. Through a partnership with local historian Dan Ellis, the Gazebo Gazette was also available online as a PDF. The online version was intended for Pass Christian residents who had relocated after the hurricane and had yet to return. Strout, whose own home was flooded in the storm,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Gazebo Gazette - August 3, 2007 - AmeriCorps thank you. pg 2 “instrumental in the early days of the GG.” The team’s early newsletter was the basis of the first few issues of the Gazebo. The team reported on city meetings and distributed the newsletter.

⁷ Joyner, Chris. “Writer sent to cover Katrina finds new life, home in Miss.” http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-08-29-katrina-mississippi-journalist_N.htm Published August 29, 2010.

⁸ Strout. pg. 54

notes, “Make no mistake about it; with no power or landline telephone service in much of the city, the traditional hard copy was vitally important in keeping a weary citizenry dutifully informed.”⁹

The issues continued to arrive weekly with updated recovery information, business openings and board meeting coverage. Using the Gazebo Gazette as a vehicle to keep the community informed, the third issue announced that an alderman was resigning his post. The article gave the man’s reasons and subsequent issues included a note about voting registration deadlines and voting places. At a time when people were focused on putting their lives back together and communication was lacking, the Gazebo Gazette appeared and gave the authoritative version of events.

By the seventh issue, the Gazebo Gazette began to transform from an amateur newsletter to a professional newsletter when it began accepting sponsorships in the form of advertising. Community support for the Gazebo Gazette continued to grow and with it the page count grew. Initially eight pages for the first six editions, the paper grew to 12 pages with the Mardi Gras edition. “And at Mardi Gras, when the local print shop in Pass Christian had opened up, I moved the printing there and began selling advertising to pay for it. Soon, I was making 600 to 650 copies, distributing them all over town, and getting phone calls from people who couldn’t find them because all the issues had been snapped up so quickly,” Burnett said.¹⁰ Moving printing to a local source not only saved on distribution costs, but it also created goodwill in the community by supporting a local business.

The March 17, 2006, edition increased to 16 pages. With the cost to publish 650 copies growing with the page count, Burnett began looking for other printing options, namely news print. *The Sea Coast Echo* in Bay St. Louis was the nearest newspaper printer. However, its presses were flooded in Hurricane Katrina and it was contracting with the *Picayune Item*, 30 miles north, to do its printing. Burnett was able to arrange a contract and, with the May 26 edition, the tabloid-sized newspaper began. The edition also set the stage for paid circulation. In the top corner of the folio line, “Suggested Donation 25¢” was published.

⁹ Strout, pg. 57

¹⁰ Shmukler.

The growing advertiser interest caused the edition to swell to 20 pages. The time demands to fill a 20-page news hole and realization that the newspaper was now a business, led Burnett to relocate from Atlanta to Pass Christian. She decided to support herself with freelance writing and grant writing while publishing the paper. “I told myself that I would try this for a year, until May 2007 (when I would turn thirty years old), and if it worked, that was great, and if it didn’t, well, it was just something cool I did for a year in my twenties,” she wrote in a freelance piece for an online publication.¹¹

Subscription rates for the Gazebo Gazette began at \$5 a month or \$48 a year for postal delivery. Home delivery was offered at \$30 a year in the Pass Christian area only beginning in June 2006. However, home delivery was abandoned later that year in October due “to high costs and logistical difficulties.”¹² In June 2007, the Gazebo Gazette boasted 400 mailed copies throughout the United States. Nearly 2,500 additional copies were distributed each week in a town with a population that continued to decrease until its low point of 4,613 in 2010.^{13 14}

With a healthy advertising base and growing circulation, the Gazebo Gazette was poised to become a fixture in Pass Christian. The information it published was needed by the citizens still reeling from Katrina. It provided a platform for town news to be openly discussed and made available to all. By August 2006, the newspaper flexed its public policy influence in a series of editorials about flood elevations. Burnett encouraged the board of aldermen to approve new guidelines so homeowners would be eligible for rebuilding grants. A few weeks later, the board acted on the new flood elevations. Strout cited another example of the Gazebo Gazette’s influence from an October 2006 edition which included a letter to the editor regarding temporary trailers in the city park. The author expressed concern about private businesses using public space rent free. The board of aldermen set lease rates shortly after the publication.

Strout writes:

¹¹ Shmukler.

¹² Gazebo Gazette. Vol. 1, Iss. 40 pg. 29

¹³ Shmukler.

¹⁴ US Census.

“The Gazebo Gazette’s creation in January 2006 was critical to residents’ being able to make informed and educated decisions about what to do with their lives. And for those who decided to stay in Pass Christian, the Gazette made the day-to-day drudgery of living just a little bit easier. It is not that the region’s daily paper - the Sun Herald - didn’t do an excellent job reporting about Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath...but it primarily had to focus on the two most populated cities, Gulfport and Biloxi. The Gazette, because it was targeting only Pass Christian, could give up-to-date information about businesses reopening, include all action from each board of aldermen meeting, list services, keep up with the food tent and housing situation and include minute details vital to each resident that the Sun Herald could not publish as the regional paper.”¹⁵

When Burnett moved to the Pass she was a single 29-year-old. In 2009, she married local marine scientist Paul Burnett, and the couple welcomed their first child in 2011. From September to December, the Gazebo Gazette was published on a biweekly schedule as the new family adjusted. In January 2012, the Gazette returned to a weekly schedule. However, in June a biweekly summer schedule was announced. The paper remained biweekly until September 2013. Burnett said her desire to spend more time with her family and the fact that the newspaper was only breaking even led her to search for new employment. “I grew to love the town so much, writing about politics and business was like writing about my family,” she said. “I felt it wasn’t fair to my readers if I couldn’t cover the town objectively. I felt the town needed a more objective newspaper.”¹⁶ The city had also reached a point in recovery where concerns about simply remaining a city and rebuilding were replaced with concerns about zoning ordinances and personal disagreements. She said “how painful it was to report on controversial issues because the newspaper was founded on the premise that citizens needed information to give them hope that the city could come back.”¹⁷

In the spring of 2013, she approached the Sea Coast Echo in Bay St. Louis about buying out the Gazebo Gazette. The Echo had become the printer for Burnett in November 2011. With a three-mile bridge separating the two publications it seemed like a good fit. The Echo had printed a Pass Christian edition decades earlier and often published articles on events in the neighboring town. After publisher Randy Ponder reviewed the financials, he declined to make an offer. The group owner of the Sea Coast

¹⁵ Strout pg 62

¹⁶ Saylor.

¹⁷ Strout. Pg. 94

Echo, Lancaster Management Inc., was not interested. If they wanted a newspaper in Pass Christian, they would print one in Pass Christian, Ponder said.

Employed by the Sea Coast Echo at the time was the author of this thesis. I started working at the Echo in January 2012 as a general assignment reporter. With a single ad salesperson working at the newspaper, advertising duties were soon assigned to me too. One of my territories was Pass Christian. Burnett and I often met when she picked up the newspaper from the Echo's press or on the streets of Pass Christian during ad calls. After talking about the sale for a few weeks, she and I agreed to a sale at the end of May 2013. In exchange for a cash payment and assumption of all debts, Burnett sold the Gazebo Gazette's subscriber list, a dozen newspaper racks, trade name and goodwill.

In her final edition, she published a good-bye column on the front page titled "Changes at the Gazebo Gazette:

"As many of you know firsthand, I began the Gazebo Gazette in January 2006 as a means of communication in the confusing days after Hurricane Katrina. What began as a small newsletter has grown, with your support over the past seven years, into the newspaper you read now. I have felt honored to be its editor and publisher during this time, watching the regrowth and resilience of this remarkable community.

At the same time, my family has also grown, and recently I was offered a professional opportunity that will allow us to have more stability in our lives. I have decided to accept this position. Trust me when I say that leaving the GG, my first baby, is one of the hardest decisions I've ever made.

What has made this step easier, however, is that the Sea Coast Echo, in Bay St. Louis, has agreed to continue publishing the Gazebo Gazette. The Echo is already very familiar with Pass Christian, which it covers in its own pages, and is also well acquainted with the Gazette, having printed the paper for the last year and a half.

Most importantly, the Echo is a 121-year-old publication that knows the importance of a newspaper to its community — that is why they are taking this on. They believe in the value and future of small-town newspapers, and I believe they are going to be able to make the Gazette even better and stronger than it is today, with more hard news and sports coverage and possibly even a return to weekly publication in the future. They plan to have someone in Pass Christian working on the Gazette full-time and even hope to open an office here. The best news is that publication will continue without a hitch: the next issue will be published on schedule on May 31.

I hope that you will support them in their commitment to keeping the Gazette going. Pass Christian is a very different place now than when I started the GG in 2006 — happily. But it also now requires a different type of newspaper, and I believe the Echo is in the best position to provide that. The Echo knows community news, and I believe they will remain committed to the core principle of the Gazebo Gazette, which is to provide news that is for and about our small, special community. I am so happy that this transition is going to allow me to remain a citizen of our remarkable city, and I thank you for your understanding now and your unwavering support during the past seven incredible years."

When the paper went to press on May 16, details of the sale were not finalized. There was discussion of the Sea Coast Echo buying the Gazebo Gazette, but ultimately the Bay St. Louis publication decided against the venture. Although the letter said the Sea Coast Echo would be taking over the paper, the son of the Sea Coast Echo publisher was the actual buyer.

By September 2013, the Gazebo Gazette returned to a weekly publishing schedule, became eligible for legal notices and began mailing at the periodical rate. It would continue in this manner for the remainder of the study period through May 2016.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The Gazebo Gazette began publication in January 2006. Over the next ten years, it grew from an eight-page publication on copy paper to a newsprint publication that was often 32 pages. To track the changes, this thesis will look at the editions published on the third Friday of May. That week was chosen because, in 2006, it marked the transition from copy paper to newsprint. The cover price, subscription price, advertising and editorial content and other business practices will all be considered. Select editions will also be addressed for major changes in business practices or content. Along the way, the thesis will look at strategies to strengthen the print product.

On January 13, 2006, the first edition of the Gazebo Gazette appeared. It was eight pages printed front and back on 8.5x11 copy paper. It's folio line was printed in the top left with volume and issue numbers. The date was centered at the top of the page. At the top right, the newsletter's price was "FREE."

Below the folio and date line, the masthead denoted the publication as "Pass Christian Gazebo Gazette" with the names set in Copper Plate font. A clipart gazebo image appeared between "Gazebo" and "Gazette." Below the logo, the newsletter's mission read "A Weekly Newsletter for the Residents and Friends of Pass Christian, Mississippi."

The first edition of the newsletter was divided into three columns of text. The left column contained a welcome note. The other two columns contained a bullet point recount of the board of aldermen meeting along with a photograph of the meeting.

From the beginning, the newspaper laid out its role as a community partner. A welcome note read:

"Welcome to the GAZEBO GAZETTE!

The GAZEBO is a place where we can meet to discuss and share resources, news and ideas.

We publish weekly, on Friday. You can find issues of the GAZEBO online and at your local businesses, churches and city buildings. Want to distribute the GAZEBO at your church or business? Contact us!

We are produced entirely by volunteers, including the team from AmeriCorps St. Louis and private individuals. Would you or your group like to get involved? Contact us!"

The welcome note ends with an email address and cell phone number and “See you next week!”¹

By the seventh issue, the Gazebo Gazette began to transform from an amateur newsletter to a professional newsletter when it began accepting sponsorships in the form of advertising. Burnett estimated it cost \$90 a week to produce the Gazebo Gazette. With the help of alderman-at-large Leo “Chipper” McDermott, sponsorships were sold for \$15 to \$25 to cover the costs.² The Mardi Gras edition, published February 24, contained 19 ads grouped together on two full pages. All five of the local elected officials ran their business cards with contact information. Six real estate companies ran ads. Pass Christian Books advertised a pictorial history book by Dan Ellis, “Images of Pass Christian.” Another ad addressed insurance claims. The remainder were for various services, including Southern Printing & Silk Screening, which became the printing house for the newspaper with that edition. By advertising locally, the business were able to get their products in front of local customers, while also showing support for the community newspaper’s mission to keep the public informed. Politicians were able to publicly show their support for the newspaper, too.

The newspaper continued to be printed on copy paper through the May 19, 2006. The edition was 14 pages with the same three-column layout. On the front page was a two-column photo by Ron Daley, a local photographer who would continue to contribute to the paper over the years. A table of contents teased inside stories (such as “Citizens Urge School Board to keep Schools in the Pass,” “Kite Festival Saturday,” and “New businesses abound”). The lead story detailed the minutes of the board of aldermen meeting, including the mayor’s announcement of a two-week leave of absence. A second story announced “New Gazebo Gazette launches next week.” It read:

This week’s issue of the Gazebo Gazette is smaller than usual, as we prepare for the launch of our new edition next week. We’ll have more news, more information and more copies — 3,000 of ‘em!— available for distribution. We’ll continue to publish weekly, on Fridays, four times every month. The Gazebo will be available at the Library, City Hall, the Shell gas station, Happy Ice, and the locations of all of our advertisers, including Kafe Katrina and Kimball’s Laundry. (*Jumps to page seven.*)

¹ Pass Christian Gazebo Gazette, Vol I, Iss 1.

² Joyner.

We'll be introducing an Announcements page, where we'll include news of birth, engagement, wedding and other community notices. We will also introduce obituaries and in memoriams. Please see page 2 for our contact information.

We'll be publishing more Letters to the Editor and editorials. Send your opinions by email or mail — see page 2 for contact information. All published letters will include the author's name and city.

A 25¢ suggested donation will be introduced with next week's issue. This will help cover the cost of printing.

If you'd like to receive the Gazebo at home, we'll begin offering mail subscriptions for \$5 a month, or \$48 a year. Copies will be mailed on the day of publication. See page at right for a subscription form.

The Gazebo hopes to be a part of the city's recovery effort by offering citizens — those in the Pass, evacuees, and friends — the information they need to thrive.”

By publishing frequent notes to readers, Burnett reiterated the newspaper's commitment to the town. Like an advertiser marketing its products, the newspaper marketed itself. Repetition of the message drove home the point that the Gazebo Gazette was the news source for Pass Christian.

Each page of the edition had a total of 33 inches of space. For the 14-page paper there was a total space of 462 inches. Advertising filled 162.5 inches or 35 percent. The entire town was distilled in those 14 pages. Information from numerous government agencies and businesses was curated, collated and presented to the public. The majority of the ads were for real estate companies or construction services - lumber yards, insulation, contractors, etc. The news hole was filled with stories about grant deadlines, aldermen meetings, a high school basketball donation, school board notes, library events and community events. The news hole also contained a half-page of free classified listings and three pages of business and service listings, which included hours, locations and contact numbers. The back page was a phone directory with government contacts and business telephone numbers listed. All the business listings and phone directory numbers were published for free as a community service to the recovering town. Aside from the photo on the front page and a stock photo of blue crabs, the rest of the art in the newspaper was clip art.

Beginning with the May 26, 2006, issue the newspaper began publishing a greyscale tabloid-sized product on newsprint. The 20-page paper was 12 inches deep by 11.25 inches wide with a print area of 10 inches square. The folio line and date layout remained the same as the copy paper style. The single copy price changed to “Suggested price 25¢” in italics. The newspaper's motto was also updated to “A weekly newspaper for the Residents and Friends of Pass Christian, Mississippi.”

The first page contained four columns of text set at a width of 2.25 inches with a quarter-inch gutter between. Two stories were printed on the front page, separated by one point rules. A directory appeared at left under the masthead teasing stories in the paper and what page they can be found on. The text was set in a sans serif font. Headlines were set in Courier, a curvy, sans-serif font. Headlines were bold and capitalized and centered over their stories. Body copy was set in a Times font face. It was aligned left without paragraph indents. A line break appeared between paragraphs. Italicized notes instructed readers to follow stories to jumps inside the paper.

Headlines inside the paper were also set in Courier, though some are capitalized and others are title case. In general, interior pages used five columns of text set in the same style as the front page. However, some stories were laid out as four columns, some as two columns and, in one case, as a single long line of text across four columns. The variance in story layout seemed to depend on how advertising and other design elements fit on the page. Bylines appeared at the end of stories in italics, and photographs accompany some stories.

Of the 1,000 total inches of printing space, advertising took up 310 inches (31 percent). Ads were still focused on real estate and construction services. There was also a full-page ad for a laundry and dry cleaning business.

The editorial content showed a town in recovery with headlines like “K-8 Schools to rebuild in the Pass,” “Business status update,” and “Council approves East Second Street traffic changes.” For the business update, the newspaper tracked down all the businesses that operated in the municipal harbor prior to the hurricane and provided their new locations or plans to rebuild. For the next several weeks, a different section of town was highlighted and its businesses updated. Instead of rumors and word of mouth, the newspaper tracked down primary sources - the business owners - and published the facts about their businesses in a permanent public forum available to everyone. The whole town could be on the same page, so to speak, when they read the Gazebo Gazette.

The editorial also showed a town reaching for normalcy: a photo spread of high school graduation, a birth announcement and a photo and outline of youths receiving their first Communion. The stories are the everyday happenings of people in towns across America. They are mundane from the objective, detached journalist point of view. But for the residents of Pass Christian, the events are the

threads that weave the fabric of the community. By publishing the stories, the Gazebo Gazette elevated the everyday into the newsworthy.

Another column showed the community's sense of humor. Christine May wrote "Trailer Gourmet: Don't let a FEMA trailer stop you from being the hostess with the most-ess!" Many people were living in trailers at the time. The article humorously noted the small size of the trailer kitchen - use "a doll-sized cutting board, there is no space for cutting and chopping" and a fold-up table "can be used as a counter-top when the only other space available is your partner's lap" - the sensitivity of smoke alarms - "don't burn the toast" - and seating arrangements - "only invite three people - you are the fourth. Make sure your guests' girth will slide easily into a booth." In a subsequent edition published in June 2006, local poet Jessie Heitzmann's piece titled "Life in a Tin Can" was published.

“Ever live the life of a lowly sardine?
Come visit my “home” to see what I mean.
Try to get dressed in a bedroom so small
That you can't bend a leg without bumping the wall.
Please don't open the sofa whatever you do
Or there'll be only an inch to navigate through.
The kitchen's such fun when you try to cook,
With barely the space for a recipe book.
Then there's that little old table, for heaven's sake,
Where you eat all those meals that there's no room to make.
But taking a shower is most fun of all,
Just don't step in the toilet as you get out of the stall.
While drying yourself, watch out for those bends
Or you and the doorknob will be more than just friends.
Don't get me wrong,
I do love my trailer.
It's like living the life of a submarine sailor.”

Tips and poems about trailer living would not make good content in most newspapers. In Pass Christian at the time, it was the kind of relentlessly local content that the community could appreciate. With many of the town's residents living in trailers while they rebuilt or awaited insurance settlements, they could relate to the nuances of living in a small space. The Gazebo Gazette approached the nuances with humor and good-cheer.

With the transition from copy paper to newsprint, the Gazebo Gazette began publishing more photos. In places, clip art accompanied some stories and was used to fill white space. The center spread, however, consisted of photos of debris around town side by side with photos of the clean up and recovery

process. The photo feature showed the amount of progress the town had made in previous nine months. It said to the community “look how far we have come,” providing a yardstick to measure hope for a full recovery.

The newspaper continued its public service commitment with nearly five full pages of business, service, church, and telephone directories published in the first newsprint edition.

In the following edition on June 1, a letter from the editor formally outlined the mission of the newspaper:

“The Pass Christian Gazebo Gazette was started in the belief that the widespread and equitable distribution of information is essential to the re-building process. I hope that you find the news and information in these pages useful and heartening. If sometimes the news isn’t all good, I hope it inspires you to get involved and to be a part of the process of making Pass Christian even better than it was before the storm.”³

The Gazebo Gazette’s style evolved and became more uniform as the publisher grew more experienced. By the September 15 issue, the style was more consistent week to week. Arial fonts replaced Courier in headlines. Body copy was justified and adhered more closely to the five-column layout.

Over the years, there was some variance in the size of the paper used to print the newspaper. The first edition of 2007 changed the print area to 11 inches by 10 inches, depth by width. The January 5, 2007, issue also included a story about the U.S. Post Office resuming home delivery after a 14-month absence. Mail delivery had been centralized at a location with 1,600 post office boxes for Pass Christian residents. With the return of home delivery, newspaper subscribers received their news more quickly and easily.

The paper took its first foray into color printing February 16, 2007. A 16-page special Mardi Gras insert was printed with color on the middle four pages, the front and back, and the inside front and back. It contained a history of Mardi Gras, a map of the town and parade route, and photographs from social events leading up to the town’s parade. It was designed as a keepsake edition that people could hold on to and reread in the years to come. Color was an added value for the product.

Color printing brought an additional expense, but the additional revenue opportunity of advertisers paying more for color ads supported the higher costs. Color printing also presented technical

³ Gazebo Gazette, Vol 1, Iss 21 pg 14

challenges. Many of the ads in the edition were out of register with blurry text from the plates not lining up. The quality of the color printing was partly a press problem and partly a technical problem. Many of the ad design elements and text were in process black instead of pure black. When process black went through the press, it received four separate impressions from the four color plates - cyan, yellow, magenta and black - that were used for newspaper printing. If the plates were even slightly out of alignment, the resulting print was blurry. Printing design elements and text in pure black would have helped prevent blurry printing.

The May 18, 2007, edition expanded to 32 newsprint pages. It carried a suggested donation price of 25¢ for single copies. Subscriptions were \$30 annually in town and \$48 out of town. The front page was laid out with a five-column design. The lead story contained a four-column photo of the new Highway 90 bridge connecting Pass Christian to Bay St. Louis. It was a major milestone that warranted a lot of coverage. An inside story related to the bridge opening informed readers that the ferry service across the Bay would stop since two lanes were open on the highway bridge. A second photo on the front page, in the far right column, showed Mississippi First Lady Marsha Barbour at a groundbreaking for a new community center. The cutline led readers to interior pages. Two other stories (board of aldermen and harbor expansion project) began on the front page and jumped to the inside pages. A table of contents appeared in the top left column.

With 32 pages, the edition contained 1,600 total inches. Advertising filled 915 inches or 57 percent of the paper. The growing advertising base indicated an increased level of recovery and economic activity in Pass Christian. While housing and construction still predominated the advertising content, the ads showed an increased variety in business. A local bank took out a five-column-by-eight-inch ad. The Gulfport airport took out a full-page ad for special flight packages. Restaurants and other entertainment and leisure businesses began making appearances. The “Community Bulletin Board” - essentially a classifieds page - included a note that the Gazebo Gazette began charging for classifieds in April. For display advertising, the rate for a business card-sized ad was listed at \$15 an issue or \$60 a month. A

business card was four column-inches, making the open rate \$3.75 an inch. If all of the 915 inches in the edition were paid, the Gazebo Gazette was bringing in \$3,400 a week in advertising.⁴

The editorial content included coverage of municipal meetings, local school news and local college graduates. A gardening column by local horticulturist Sylvia McLaurin also appeared. It became a feature in the newspaper for several years, offering advice pertinent to local gardeners. An obituary was published along with a note outlining the newspaper's policy for free obituaries. The newspaper continued to publish for free nearly five full pages of business, service, church, and telephone directories. On page 27, there was a call for news submissions - "birthdays, anniversaries, engagements, weddings, babies, graduations and so on" - that continued to show the newspaper's editorial line and connection to the community. When something happened in the lives of readers, the Gazebo Gazette wanted to publish it and share it with the community.

The July 27, 2007, edition carried an announcement for an additional distribution option. Burnett purchased 12 coin-operated racks and spread them around town. The racks were hunter green with white logos. The price increased to 50¢ for single copies. The subsequent edition announced the locations of the newspaper racks. Prior to the racks, single copies were left at distribution locations with a donation jar. Some people made donations, some did not. Over the years, some of the donation jars disappeared. The racks were a secure way to ensure payment for the newspapers and help ensure the payment would be collected.

In September 2007, the newspaper began offering branded apparel. Baseball caps - green with white lettering, like the news racks - were available for \$10.⁵ In November, the apparel expanded to khaki hats and t-shirts (green and white) for \$10.⁶ The apparel used a new logo design that would later become the newspaper's mast head. The apparel provided an additional revenue stream and turned wearers into

⁴ Many newspapers sell advertising as column-inches. In the Gazebo Gazette, any given page is 5 columns wide by 10 inches deep. In other words, there are 50 column inches on any given page. When selling by the column inch, advertisers buy a certain amount of inches and an ad is designed using those inches. For instance, if an advertiser buys four inches, the ad could run in several ways: It could be one-inch tall and stretch across four columns as a banner; it could be four inches tall and stack up in one column; or it could be two columns wide and two inches tall, about the size of a business card.

⁵ September 7, 2007

⁶ November 30, 2007

marketers. When people saw their neighbors wearing Gazebo Gazette clothes, it reinforced the two-year-old newspaper's presence in the community.

As the paper approached its two-year anniversary, it printed 48 times a year. A note in February 2008 laid out the schedule: "The Gazebo Gazette publishes 48 times a year, four times a month. Friday, Feb. 29 is the fifth Friday of February, so we won't be publishing on that Friday. Please send us any early March news for the issue of Feb. 22 before Feb. 19."⁷ The published schedule covered most of the major city meetings, which were usually held in the first four weeks of each month. The fifth week of the month was often a slow news week. Instead of scraping for content, the off weeks allowed for time off a few times a year. However, if two more editions a year would have been published, the Gazebo Gazette would have become a legal newspaper under Mississippi law. The status of legal newspaper would have allowed for legal advertising, a potentially large revenue stream.

The work Burnett put into the newspaper and its role in the community received recognition from Columbia University. In April 2008, she received an alumni award for "a distinguished journalism career in any medium, for an outstanding single accomplishment in journalism, for notable contributions to journalism education, or for achievement in related fields."⁸

The May 16, 2008, edition led with a story about an annual seafood festival. The front page article of the 32-page paper featured two photos of carnival rides being set up on the fair grounds. The other lead stories announced an upcoming public meeting and the opening of a Navy office at the municipal harbor. A table of contents teased inside stories.

With 1,600 total inches, the paper was almost evenly split between advertising (49.6%) and editorial (50.4%) content. The advertising content still featured a large pool of real estate options. It also showed more entertainment options, with four half-page ads for restaurants, two large ads for festivals and several smaller ads for art galleries and book stores. The editorial content also showed a community interested in entertainment options. The front page story about the seafood festival jumped to page two. On page four, a list of library events appeared. A festival for the one-year anniversary of the Highway 90

⁷ Feb. 8, 2008

⁸ April 11, 2008

Bridge opening was featured on pages six and seven. School awards and graduation stories filled most of the remaining news hole. The paper gave readers a common forum for community activity and engagement. A financial column, McLaurin's gardening column and Robin Rafferty's history column also appeared. Photographs were used much more than in previous years. Nearly every story was published with some accompanying photograph or artwork. The edition closed with five pages of community directories, and a tide chart on the back page. A note on the second page reminded readers that the paper will not publish a May 30 edition since it was the fifth Friday of the month. As readers became accustomed to seeing the weekly newspaper, the publishing reminders kept every one on the same schedule and helped prevent confusion when an edition was skipped due to an off week.

In June 2008, a popular travel photo feature began. "Take us on your summer vacation" the headline reads.⁹ The photo shows Burnett with the newspaper in St. John, US Virgin Islands with "Distance from Pass Christian: 1,751 miles." The mile marker would become standard in the travel photo feature. In an edition the next month, three separate readers submitted photos with the paper or wearing Gazebo Gazette branded shirts or hats.¹⁰ The August 1, 2008, issue showed a photo of a Gazebo Gazette hat in the New York Times newsroom. The caption read "A Gazebo Gazette pal sends greetings from the New York Times newsroom - fitting, since we like to think of ourselves as the NYT of Pass Christian: All the News That's Fit to Print in Pass Christian!" Over the years, the newspaper would go scuba diving and skydiving among other adventures. In March 2011, the newspaper even visited Antarctica. "This journey marks visits to all seven continents for both Ms. (Charlotte) Christman and the GG — our readers have taken us on their travels throughout North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia and, now, even Antarctica. We've been scuba diving and sky diving, on safari, through Niagra Falls and had many other adventures."¹¹ Instead of just being sending information to readers through news reports, the travel feature allowed readers to be content creators by sharing their travels with neighbors and the rest of

⁹ June 13, 2008

¹⁰ July 11, 2008

¹¹ March 25/April 1, 2011

the community. It was a forum for audience engagement and interaction which strengthened the relationship with the newspaper.

In September 2008, Hurricane Gustav made landfall on the third anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. It was a relatively minor storm, but it still caused flooding, downed trees and knocked out power. A note in the edition following the storm titled “Keeping in Touch,” saw the newspaper outline its goal to keep people up to date during disasters by using online publishing. “The Gazebo Gazette will try to keep our website updated with Pass Christian news as much as possible during emergencies. Please continue to check local TV and radio for critical weather reports and general safety notices, but take a look at us online too for news on utilities, public safety, supplies and openings and closings for the Pass Christian area only. If you are in the Pass Christian area and without power, we will try to post written updates once curfews are lifted at the following locations: Espy Center, Fire Station No. 1 on Second Street, and Shell Station on North Street.” While print was the Gazebo Gazette’s primary format, articles posted online enabled the news outlet to provide information as it became available. Burnett curated stories and notes from residents and local leaders and posted them online several times a day during and after the storm. The newspaper’s disaster coverage even received mention in the Columbia Journalism Review.¹²

Elsewhere in the issue, in the “Gazebo Gazette Around the World” feature, a photo of two Pass Christian residents holding the newspaper was published. The subheading read “Greetings from Gustav” and “And, yes, the GG is more reliable than cable!” The cutline identified two people reading the Gazebo Gazette at their address after the cable went out from Gustav.¹³

While many newspapers in American were languishing in the Great Recession during 2008 and 2009, the Gazebo Gazette did not exhibit any noticeable effects. Page counts averaged 32 pages with high percentages of advertising. Other businesses in the community were not so lucky. In April 2009, a story reported on a large commercial development in downtown that had come to a standstill and later abandoned.¹⁴

¹² Kim, Jane. “Gustav vs. the Gazette.” http://www.cjr.org/the_kicker/gustav_vs_the_gazette.php?print=true Published Sept. 3, 2008.

¹³ Sept. 5, 2008

¹⁴ April 17, 2009

An editor's note on page two of the May 8, 2009, edition announced the marriage of the Gazebo Gazette's founding publisher. "These are exciting times at the Gazebo Gazette! We're getting married next Saturday, May 16 (by "we," we mean GG editor Evelina Shmukler and the future Mr. GG, Paul Burnett), and that is going to mean a few slight changes in our publishing schedule," the note reads.¹⁵ The publisher went on to state the upcoming deadlines and said a fifth edition would be published in May to cover the municipal election. The off-week was moved to the last week in June and the first week of July so the newlyweds could go on a two-week honeymoon. The note ended with an urging to subscribe to the newspaper to receive a special wedding postcard during the honeymoon. In July, the newlyweds returned from their honeymoon and published photos to share the European vacation with readers.¹⁶

The May 15, 2009, edition was published as scheduled the day before the wedding. The 32-page paper consisted of 1,600 total inches, with advertising filling 932 inches or 58.25 percent. About 130 of the ads were for municipal political candidates. The editorial content followed suit with a table of candidates and polling locations published on page three.

The lead story covered two building grand openings and fills the front page. A new Boys & Girls Club opened and a new Navy building opened in the harbor. Three photos illustrated the stories. A table of contents covered two columns on the bottom left. A banner appeared above the logo teasing a page two story about a special planning meeting on the topic of city streets. Both of the front page stories jumped to inside pages where the stories continue with more accompanying photographs. The other inside pages covered upcoming street plans, a new gymnasium design with floor plans, school awards and youth club activities. Several regular columns appeared, along with "Gazebo Gazette Around the World."

The Gazebo Gazette also continued selling branded merchandise. A house ad on page 31 offered t-shirts for \$10 to \$17 depending on size and whether the shirt is picked up or mailed. Baseball caps were \$10 picked up or \$15 shipped. Buyers were also encouraged to take pictures in their branded merchandise and submit them to the paper for publication. One reader would continue to send in picture of his travels with a Gazebo Gazette t-shirt for the next seven years. It went to over twenty countries.

¹⁵ May 8, 2009

¹⁶ July 10, 2009. After two week break for honeymoon, the edition includes photos from the honeymoon in France, Belgium and Italy.

A special double edition came out before Thanksgiving, and a 24-page holiday gift guide was published the week of Thanksgiving. With all local advertising, it put local products in front of local residents. By advertising locally, merchants hoped to keep local dollars in town and save people the time and effort of going out of town to seek merchandise. The advertising content gave readers the information needed to make informed decisions about the products and services available in the local market.

Beginning in April 2010, the telephone directories were adjusted. “We have re-formatted our free listings sections, to allow more room for Classifieds and other features and information. Like it? Hate it? Want something different? We’d love your feedback!”¹⁷ The listings are tightened up with line breaks removed and a smaller font. Instead of using five pages, the listings now take up three. Advertisers were listed in bold. The tide chart was removed from the back page. The tide table returned the next week in the classified section “per reader request.” The willingness to seek and act on feedback strengthened the relationship with readers by giving them a sense of ownership in the printed product.

The May 21, 2010, edition featured a front page design split into four columns. The lead story was about the BP oil spill and efforts by the harbor to prevent contamination. Two stand-alone photos and cutlines also appeared on the front. The edition saw the return of the newspaper’s initial function as the information source in the face of disaster. The BP oil spill occurred in late April when an explosion killed 11 workers. Oil gushed into the Gulf of Mexico for 87 days until the well was capped. Wind and tidal currents carried the oil to beaches along the Gulf Coast, including Pass Christian. In addition to the lead story and jump on page two, pages four and five contained information about the response and recovery, including government contact numbers for people needing to file claims or report oil sightings. Page nine featured an article about University of Southern Mississippi researchers studying how the oil spill affected tuna. Page 28 had a letter from state Sen. David Baria to the governor calling for more response to the oil spill. While other news outlets tried to cover the disaster as a whole, the Gazebo Gazette kept its focus local and told how Pass Christian was affected and how residents could respond. When readers picked up the newspaper, they knew oil spill coverage would be information they could use.

¹⁷ April 9, 2010

The rest of the editorial content covered school board news, high school athletics, graduations and a feature on rising sales tax collections. The community directory remained three pages. An editor's note at the top of the business directory indicated that bolded listings were advertisers in the Gazebo Gazette and asked readers to support the advertisers. Bolded listings were a bonus for advertisers, a little lagniappe, or something extra in the local vernacular. It made the businesses stand out a little more from the rest of the listings, making them more likely to be noticed for both their products and support of the community newspaper.

With 1,600 total inches, the paper was split about 60 percent editorial and 40 percent advertising. The advertising content was much more heterogenous than previous years with a variety of businesses buying space. Real estate listings were fewer though there were still three half-page ads and one full-page ad of home listings. There were over 50 advertisers in the edition, the majority of them took out business card-sized ads.

A special advertisement was also published on the front page. It was a thank-you note to the Gazebo Gazette and publisher Evelina Burnett from her "P.C. Friends." An editor's note indicated the ad space was donated to a silent auction benefiting the Boys & Girls Club. The winners had their choice to fill the space with whatever they chose. By donating the space to the silent auction, the newspaper was able to help raise money for a local club, a marketing move which increases the newspaper's goodwill in the community. In fact, subscription gift certificates were often donated to local non-profits to help them raise money. The gift subscriptions also help grow the subscriber base.

The May 20, 2011, edition was 28 pages in grayscale. The lead story was a photo spread of the 2011 Pass High School graduating class. A second story about Mississippi River flooding affecting local oyster beds began on page one and jumps inside. A table of contents at left teased inside stories.

With 1,400 total inches, the edition was split 57 percent (805 inches) to 43 percent advertising to editorial. The edition contained six full-page ads, along with a host of business card-sized ads. The ads were diverse, promoting entertainment, shopping, dining, real estate, a hospital and various services. There was also city legal notice. Since the Gazebo Gazette was published 48 times a year, it was not a legal newspaper by state statute. To qualify, a publication must produce a weekly paper with at least 50 editions a year. Although the Gazebo Gazette was not a legal newspaper at the time, the city would often

advertise in the city newspaper as well as the regional newspaper. City leaders recognized that the Gazebo Gazette was Pass Christian's newspaper and regularly advertised job openings and announcements.

The editorial content included a list of Pass High graduates, sailing news, track and field results, community events and obituaries. Several regular columns appeared along with the community directories and tide chart.

In the September 2/September 9, 2011, double edition, Burnett announced the birth of her first child. "Dear Readers, Baby Gazebo Gazette has entered the world a bit earlier than we expected! Paul and I welcomed our son, Samuel Lev Burnett, on August 31, 2011. He weighed 5lb., 10oz, and was 19 inches long. Due to our very happy surprise, I have combined the Sept. 2 and Sept. 9 issues. As many of you know, the Gazebo Gazette is a lean enterprise - essentially, a one-woman shop with lots of wonderful volunteers, helpers, friends and associates. Because of this, I will be moving to a twice monthly publishing schedule - timed for the Friday after the regular weekly aldermen meeting - through at least the rest of this year. Subscribers will have their subscriptions extended by two months, and I will be contacting advertisers directly to explain the new publishing schedule and related changes to advertising opportunities. My apologies for any inconvenience this may cause you, my readers and friends, but I hope you will understand and continue to support the GG. See you in our next issue on Sept. 23. Sincerely, Evelina Shmukler, Editor & Publisher, Gazebo Gazette"¹⁸

In the following edition an updated bi-weekly publishing schedule with deadlines was published on page two along with a picture of Baby Gazebo Gazette, also known as Sam Burnett. The bi-weekly publishing continued until the end of the year. In the final edition of 2011, a publishing note announced the return of weekly publication starting with the first edition in 2012. "Thank you to our readers, subscribers and advertisers for your patience and understanding during our bi-weekly "maternity leave" these past few months. This gave me some time with Baby GG, while allowing me the flexibility to continue publishing my first baby, the Gazebo Gazette."¹⁹ The frequent publishing notes kept readers

¹⁸ September 2/Sept 9, 2011

¹⁹ Dec. 23/Dec. 30, 2011

abreast of her business decisions and made them part of the process. By extending subscriptions, she acknowledged subscribers importance and worked to keep them satisfied.

For the first few months of 2012, the newspaper appeared in color. There were eight color pages in each edition - the front, the inside front, the middle four pages, the inside back and back cover. Ad prices increased to \$25 for a business card size to bring in more revenue.²⁰ Color ads were also charged at higher rate. However, the color print quality was spotty. Many of the pictures are muddy and out of register. Color became intermittent in March with a week of color followed by a week of greyscale. In April, the newspaper returned to greyscale and stay that way until February 2013.

The May 18, 2012, edition was printed on 16 pages with 800 total inches of space. Although the page count was reduced, the advertising-to-editorial ratio remained high with 54 percent advertising (430 inches) to 46 percent editorial. There were over 40 advertisers in the edition. A house ad said advertising rates started at \$25 for a business card (four-inch) ad, which meant the open rate was \$6.50. With the reduced advertising inches, the page count was also cut to reduce costs. In previous years, the community directories were spread across several pages, often without a single ad on the pages. In other words, those pages were printed with the publisher carrying the costs. By cutting pages without advertising, Burnett was able to save on printing and on postage.

Although the paper was smaller, the editorial content still provided focused community news. The lead stories involved a new school principal and teacher pay raises. The front page also showed updates to the recreational sports facilities with photos by local photographer Ron Daley. The table of contents took up the left column. Library news, sailing news, community festivals and a photo spread of Pass High graduation awards filled the inside pages. With less of a news hole, the community directories were reduced to a dining directory with the telephone numbers of local restaurants. The tide chart was also reduced in size.

Beginning in June, a bi-weekly summer publishing schedule was announced: “the Gazebo Gazette will return to an every-other-week publication schedule this summer. Our upcoming issues will be June 8, June 22, July 6 and July 20. The deadline for each issue is the Tuesday prior to publication.”

²⁰ January 20, 2012

“Subscribers: We will move forward all subscriptions due to the changed summer schedule.”²¹ In the July 6/July 13, 2012, edition, the summer schedule was extended to include August 3 and August 17. The first edition in August extended the schedule into September, and the October 26/November 2, 2012, edition announced the every-other-week schedule would remain for the foreseeable future.

The August 31/September 7 edition covered Hurricane Isaac making landfall on the Mississippi coast on the seventh anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, August 29. On the back page, the local directories were published with a note “In light of the events of last week, we decided to run the local directories one more time. We probably won’t include them every week, so please save this page if you’d like to keep these numbers handy.”²² Also in the edition was a note titled “Baby GG is 1!” The note said Baby GG turned one on August 31 and the community was invited to a birthday party in the park. “Thank you for your patience and kindness during this exciting (and exhausting) year!!!”²³ The regular family notes made readers feel like part of her family. As a member of the community, Burnett’s personal life was deeply entwined with readers. Instead of distancing readers, she embraced them.

The May 17, 2013, edition was a 28-page double edition covering the weeks of May 17 and May 24. The Gazebo Gazette was still biweekly at this point. In her final edition as publisher, Burnett published a front page letter announcing the sale of the Gazebo Gazette. With 1,400 total inches of space, the 28-page edition contained 662 inches of advertising (250 of which were political). One full-page ad was by incumbent mayor Leo “Chipper” McDermott. In large letters, the ad read “Thank you, Evelina, for all you have done for us from our darkest hour to the light of day. You have been a part of our lives, and we thank you for a job well done.” Another half-page ad from the Chamber of Commerce extended thank you to the Gazebo Gazette for all its support since 2006. “You are an OUTSTANDING citizen. Good luck in your new job!” The final edition under Burnett featured municipal election coverage with six pages of interviews with the candidates. Only interview transcripts appeared on five of those pages. No ads. No pictures. Just information that the readers needed to make informed decisions. Other editorial content

²¹ June 1, 2012

²² August 31/Sept. 7, 2012

²³ August 31/Sept. 7, 2012

included typical stories for the middle of May: graduation, school awards, community festivals, and library events.

On the back page, Burnett published the community directories with a note: “We know how important the phone directory has been to so many of our readers, so we wanted to publish it one more time. Please save this page if you’d like to keep these numbers handy!” She also published a picture of her son with a note to readers, “Thank you being a part of our family and letting our family be a part of yours!” It was signed “Mr. & Mrs. GG and Baby GG (henceforth to be known as Paul, Evelina and Sam).”

The May 31, 2013, edition was the first published by new owner Jace Ponder. The style was the similar to previous editions of the Gazebo Gazette. However, the template had to be rebuilt. Burnett used Windows-based computers running Microsoft Publisher. Ponder used Apple computers running Adobe Creative Suite. Once the template was made using InDesign and the style sheets saved, the blank template would be used week after week to build the new editions. Headlines were now centered and set in Times font face, some were bold and others were regular. Bylines were capitalized, bold Times. Body copy was justified and set in Times font face. Paragraphs were indented and the line break between paragraphs was removed. Jumps were set in bold Times font. Stories were separated by a one-point line. The style became standard for the next three years.

The Gazebo Gazette continued to publish bi-weekly, and, in the August 9, 2013, edition, a letter from the publisher outlined plans for the newspaper: “As many of you know, the Gazebo Gazette has been undergoing a transition for the past few months. Its founder Evelina Shmukler Burnett recently made a career change, and I made an offer to buy the paper and continue its publication. Evelina began publishing the newspaper in January 2006 to provide the Pass Christian community with much needed information during the recovery from Hurricane Katrina. What began as a collection of telephone numbers and distribution points printed on copy paper has grown into the newspaper you hold today: a chronicle of this diverse community and the talented people who live here. I have never been one to fix what isn’t broken. The editorial line of the newspaper will continue to focus on Pass Christian and the people who make the city special. In addition to stories about government and schools that you expect, coverage will expand a little to include more hard news from the police and court departments. The

stories of the people who keep the community safe deserve to be told. With the school year set to begin, you can expect pictures and stories about high school sports. There will be some future changes, too, including the return of a classified page. And the return of a weekly publishing schedule. Stay tuned. - Jace”²⁴

The September 6, 2013, edition marked the return to weekly publishing. It included a letter from the publisher, “Welcome to the new Gazebo Gazette.”

“Since I began publishing the newspaper in June, I have been working toward the goal of returning the Gazebo Gazette to a weekly print schedule. Beginning with the issue you are holding in your hands, that goal has been realized. Through the support of readers and local businesses the newspaper is able to grow to bring you more Pass Christian news more often. The change in frequency also makes the Gazebo Gazette a legal publication, meaning the city, the school district and other government bodies can post legal notices in the newspaper. When the city changes an ordinance, they can publish it here. When the school board calls a special meeting, they can publish it here. Legal notices provide the public with increased transparency into government functions. It makes sense to have Pass Christian legal notices within the pages of the newspaper that covers the city and school district with more depth than any other publication. Along with the change in frequency, there is a slight change in delivery. The newspaper will no longer be folded and tabbed. Instead it will be delivered as a flat. The newspaper will still be delivered to your mailbox on Fridays, as you have come to expect. I have also been working with the US Post Office to get same day delivery in town so you get the news quicker. There may be a few hiccups along the way as we iron out the details of weekly delivery. You may be wondering how the change in frequency will affect your subscription. It won’t. All current subscriptions will continue to receive uninterrupted delivery. If your subscription is not current, I ask for your continued support and urge you to renew. You won’t want to miss what happens as Pass Christian continues (sic) to grow. Feel free to contact the Gazebo Gazette if you have any questions, comments or news tips. The newspaper contact information will always be published on page four. Best,
-Jace R Ponder
Publisher”

By continuing the precedent of open communication with readers, Ponder was settling fears that the newspaper would change under a new owner. The continuity kept readers and subscribers engaged.

Before the September 2013 edition, the Gazebo Gazette was printed at the Sea Coast Echo and taken to a distributor in Gulfport. The distributor labelled and prepared the newspaper for First Class Mail

²⁴ August 9, 2013

via the U.S. Post Office. The distributor charged about \$100 for labor each edition. First Class postage was about \$300 each edition. In September, the Sea Coast Echo printed and labelled the newspapers which were mailed as periodicals. By obtaining a periodical permit, postage dropped by a third to about \$100 each edition. Periodical mailing also required less labor. First Class Mail had to be folded in half to fit requirements. Periodicals can be mailed as flats. The Echo charged \$50 for the labelling. In other words, distribution costs were cut by about \$250 a week.

To increase revenues, subscription rates rose to \$25 in Pass Christian and \$30 out of town. Advertising rates were set at a modular rate: \$20 for a business card, \$40 for a double business card, \$50 for a quarter page, \$100 for a half page and \$200 for a full page. Color was \$50 extra. The open rate was \$5.50 for advertisers who wanted custom sizes sold by the column inch. Not only did the modular rate make it easier for the advertiser to understand what they were buying, it made it easier to layout pages. With the majority of ads fitting together aesthetically on the page, the modular system made the pages look composed and orderly.

Later in September, the newspaper's logo changed.²⁵ The logo that was used on branded apparel became the newspaper's masthead. It showed the city name in a smaller font arching over a new gazebo image. The newspaper's name became more prominent, and the motto was deleted. The intention was for future expansion into the neighboring city of Long Beach, which was not served by a community paper. The plan never developed during the case study time frame.

In October 2013, the first official legal notices appeared in the Gazebo Gazette. Legal notices had been published in previous years, but they were run as a courtesy to the city and residents. Since the paper was never weekly, the notices were not officially legal. The edition included a notice for the newspaper, the statement of ownership required by the U.S. Postal Service for periodical permit holders. It showed the paper with a circulation of 778.²⁶ The edition also includes 20 insurance abstracts published for the Mississippi Insurance Department.

²⁵ September 20, 2013

²⁶ October 4, 2013

By the end of the calendar year in 2013, the Gazebo Gazette posted a 27 percent profit on gross receipts. Advertising made up nearly 86 percent of revenue. Subscriptions and single copy racks sales made up the remainder. Printing, distribution and postage made up nearly 60 percent of expenses. Rent was the next biggest expense at 20 percent. The remaining expense were for office supplies, phones and assorted operation costs.

By the time the May 16, 2014, edition was published, the Gazebo Gazette was on a weekly printing schedule and color was standard. Due to the press arrangement, each issue had eight pages of color: the front, inside front, back, inside back and the middle four pages. In addition to allowing for more color photography, the color pages allowed for more advertising revenue from businesses who paid for color ad placement. The 20-page paper totaled 1,000 inches, with 505 inches of ads (50.5%) to 495 editorial. The advertising showed a variety of businesses with no one category predominating, like real estate and construction ads did from 2006 to 2011. The editorial content showed a town that had stabilized and settled into its annual rhythms: graduations, yearly festivals, school awards, etc. There was also a story about Evelina Burnett receiving an award for her radio story on Mississippi Public Broadcasting.

On page four, the Gazebo Gazette's name plate was published. It includes the publisher's name and contact information, along with a postal statement required by the U.S. Postal Service for periodical mailing. The subscription prices were listed as \$25 a year in Pass Christian and \$30 out of town.

By the end of 2014, subscriptions brought in \$13,200. Advertising brought in \$70,600. Single copy sales brought in another \$2,000 for total revenues of about \$86,000. Printing and postage remained to two largest yearly expenses at nearly 37 percent combined. Rent and freelance labor were about 10 percent of expenses each. After other expense were accounted for, the Gazebo Gazette posted about 51 percent profit.

The May 15, 2015, issue was 16 pages. It was 57.5 percent advertising to 42.5 percent editorial. The advertising content was similar to the previous year as the core advertising market settled. In fact, many of the ads were unchanged from the previous year. The lead stories covered annual festivals and school district awards. Other editorial content included local event briefs, high school sports, and a financial column. A hard news story about a drowning at the municipal harbor appeared on page four.

Typically, hard news stories involving crime or death were placed on inside pages. By focusing on positive news, the newspaper helped uplift the town.

In December 2015, a holiday schedule was announced. A note said no paper would be published on January 1 (New Year's Day). The first edition of 2016 would be published on January 8.²⁷ It was the only edition skipped under Ponder's ownership. For the year, the newspaper posted a 46 percent profit.

The May 13, 2016, edition was 16-page with a front page covering the blessing of the fishing boats and the search for a new school superintendent. Inside stories covered school awards, the community theatre and community events. Editorial filled about 52 percent of the paper, and advertising filled 48 percent.

The edition carried a 75¢ cover price. Initially, there was a drop in revenue from the price increase, but after a few weeks, single copy revenue sales were consistently higher over previous years. It may have been that buyers were used to carrying two quarters to a machine and did not have the third quarter to buy a copy. The subscription price was also higher than the previous year. In town subscriptions were \$30 a year and out of town subscriptions were \$35. By the end of May 2016, combined revenue from subscribers and single copy sales was up over 14 percent.

The May 27, 2016, marked the final edition with Jace Ponder as publisher. A goodbye note introduced the new owner and publisher, Stephen Flanagan Jackson.

“Three years ago, I stepped into the role of publisher of the Gazebo Gazette. I left a reporting and advertising job at the Sea Coast Echo for the opportunity to publish my own newspaper. I was 27, untested as a business owner and more than a little scared about the future of the newspaper. Now I'm 31, somewhat experienced as a business owner, and more than confident in the future of the Gazebo Gazette. In 2013, my goals were to publish weekly, carry legal notices, and focus on positive community news. Now in 2016, the Gazebo Gazette is a weekly publication carrying legal notices with a spotlight on the achievements of locals. Due to continued support from the Pass Christian community, the newspaper is on a solid foundation. It has reached a point that allows me to step aside and let a new owner step in. Stephen Flanagan Jackson will assume the reins of The Gazebo Gazette May 30 as the new owner/publisher/editor. He is a veteran journalist, newspaperman, and journalism educator originally from Montgomery, Alabama.

²⁷ December 18, 2015

He has worked for, managed and owned newspapers throughout the United States, South America and Central America.

During the 1980s and 90s, he reported on the drug wars and the killing of journalists in Latin American countries.

He also worked for the Dean of Mississippi journalists, Bill Minor, at the former Capitol Reporter in Jackson, where he also served as journalism professor at Tougaloo College. In other words, Steve Jackson is an accomplished journalist, well-versed in the business of community news.

I will work with him though the transition this summer, introducing him to residents and assisting with newspaper production.

During that time I will also work on completing a thesis for a masters degree in journalism at Ole Miss.

After that, I plan to take a month off to travel before deciding what comes next.

You will still see me around town, and I will continue to be an active member of the Pass Christian community.

I have formed friendships and made connections that I hope will carry on and continue to grow.

I am deeply indebted to the community, especially founder Evelina Shmukler Burnett, for giving me the opportunity to run the Gazebo Gazette for the last three years.

Thank you to all the subscribers, advertisers and contributors who make it possible for the Gazebo Gazette to operate week after week.

Thank you Pass Christian for your support, encouragement and confidence.

Steve and his wife, Marina Soche de Jackson, originally from Bogota, Colombia, plan to make their home in Pass Christian.

He can be contacted at the Gazebo Gazette office at 300 G in the CC Lynch Building 300 Davis Avenue or at 205.393.4909 and sfjackson10@gmail.com.

Jace R. Ponder, Publisher²⁸

Just as Burnett passed the baton with going away letter, Ponder set the stage for the new owner to continue the mission of the Gazebo Gazette.

Jackson purchased the publication's goodwill, subscriber list, news racks and office equipment. He agreed to honor outstanding advertising contracts and all current subscriptions. What the future holds for Jackson and the Gazebo Gazette is the subject of another study.

²⁸ May 27, 2016

CONCLUSION

The Gazebo Gazette is just one of thousands of print newspapers in America. It defines its coverage area as the town of Pass Christian and week after week delivers local news that cannot be found anywhere else. Coverage of local government keeps residents informed in the democratic process. Stories about the activities of neighbors and friends creates a unifying sense of community. A local marketing option keeps merchants and service providers in front of their core market.

While the struggles of city daily newspapers are often highlighted in media reports, the success of smaller publications often escapes notice. By focusing on local people and places, providing unique content and being a part of the community they serve, 5,700 community weekly newspapers are published across America. All newspapers, whether a community weekly or city daily, have faced increased competition for readers from other media, including radio, television and, most strongly, the Internet. In response, newspapers have cut expenses by reducing staff, lowering page counts and printing fewer editions. To raise revenues, newspapers have increased circulation prices, implemented online paywalls, and offered online advertising. While there has been a strong push for print newspapers to go online, a workable business model has yet to develop. Until it does, newspapers' revenues continue to be driven by its print products. Since newspapers are businesses first, they have to make a profit to be able to make news. By remaining close to their readers, community newspapers will continue to exist. Print-first business models are still workable and profitable, as shown by the Gazebo Gazette.

Looking to the future, digital publishing seems to be the biggest threat and opportunity to community newspapers. Nielsen Scarborough's 2015 Newspaper Penetration Report indicates a majority of newspaper consumers still prefer a print product over a digital product, but only barely - 51 percent read a newspaper exclusively in print, while just 17 percent read exclusively on desktop or mobile or a combination of the two digital platforms.¹ The Pew Center notes in a 2016 State of the News feature on

¹ Barthel, Michael. State of the News Media 2016. <http://www.journalism.org/2016/06/15/newspapers-fact-sheet/>

newspapers that there has been steady decline in print readership, from 62 percent in 2011 and 59 percent in 2012.¹ Editor & Publisher reported that the time spent reading a daily print newspaper in America has declined from an average of 31.4 minutes in 2008 to 21.7 minutes in 2012.² Meanwhile, the digital audience continues to grow, from 142 million unique monthly visitors to American digital newspaper websites in October 2013 to 166 million a year later.³ Further, another report in Editor and Publisher claimed Americans were spending just short of three hours a day on their mobile devices in 2015, as compared with only 24 minutes a day in 2010.⁴ As readers move away from print in favor of digital, advertisers are following along. The report goes on to predict “mobile will capture nearly a quarter of the entire ad spend of all media in the United States.”⁵

Community newspapers cannot ignore the growing adoption of online and mobile devices. However, publishers do not have to see digital news as the only option for staying in business. The Gazebo Gazette was born in the digital age as a print product. Online and digital publishing complimented the print product’s content, but provided no revenue benefit. The print-first business model provided success for ten years and set the stage for continued profitability. Future studies can look at how to generate profitability with a digital product whether the publication is born-digital or a compliment to an existing print product.

In the meantime, publishers must continue to do the work that many community newspapers like the Gazebo Gazette set out to do: Cover their communities with depth, fairness and empathy.

¹ Barthel.

² Editor & Publisher. April 2015. pg. 21

³ Editor & Publisher. April 2015. pg. 21

⁴ Mutter, Alan D. “Now you See Me: Mobile moves to ad domination.” Editor & Publisher. June 2015. pg 22-23

⁵ Mutter.

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