



## Health news service might not be unbiased

The American press has a long history of independence, a tradition which began in a rough-and-tumble world where every town might have half a dozen newspapers, each with its own (or its owners') point of view, but culminated in the established, supposedly unbiased era we live in today.

Newspapers pride themselves on their independence and their supposedly unbiased look at the world around them. And while we all know the system is hardly perfect, that there's no such thing as a total lack of bias, it does work pretty well most of the time.

In its heyday, the business was not unlike today's Internet. Any fool with a press and some type could start a newspaper, and more than a few did. As it became more of an industry, however, it became both harder to start a newspaper - bigger, faster presses were a lot more expensive than the hand press of the 1830s - and harder to keep one going.

The industry consolidated and grew to the point where newspapers dominated the political and public conversation, but at the same time there were fewer and fewer voices. Editors responded by firmly establishing the independence of the newsroom, insulating it from the supposedly corrupting influence of advertisers and politicians.

When there was only one paper in most towns, after all, the responsibility was great to ensure that everyone was treated fairly and that all voices were heard. And that has worked out pretty well, too.

All of which makes it hard to explain the rise of something called the KHI News Service, a supposedly independent operation run by the Kansas Health Institute. The Institute itself is a little bit of a mystery, a "think tank" and advocacy organization established by the Kansas Health Foundation. And if you're getting a little tired of wading through the layers, take a breath and hang on.

The foundation was created by the United Methodist Church with money from the sale of Wichita's Wesley Medical Center to a private operator nearly 30 years ago. The church put a

\$200 million endowment into the foundation, originally known as the Wesley Medical Endowment.

So the Wichita-based foundation begat the institute, housed in Topeka near policy makers and the Legislature. And the institute formed the news service, which lately has been pushing its "independent" status. At the same time, the foundation has branched out into offering commentary on health issues.

Some respected newspapers have accepted stories from the service, which hired several veteran Statehouse reporters at a time when the papers were cutting back on Topeka coverage. More recently, some have questioned the service's independence, especially in light of the commentary, or editorial, operation at the institute.

Certainly, the service is not an independent news source in the same sense as the Associated Press, a cooperative formed by newspapers to cover national and international news. No one tells AP how to cover the news, though the owner-members certainly set the budget and priorities.

But the institute still puts up most of the budget for its offspring, the news service.

So how's a reader to evaluate a news story from the institute? (These do not appear in our papers, by the way.) With care, we'd say, because the organization does have a viewpoint. It's up to each reader to evaluate the material.

The best advice is the old line, "consider the source," and this source has a bias toward public-health goals set by an activist few. Good or bad, these are things we could all disagree on.

A good example is a recent study by the institute trumpeted in Kansas newspapers that supposedly shows that the state's ban on indoor smoking has not hurt restaurant or bar trade. An independent review by one Kansas newspaper showed that the study's contention that sales have held up fails to consider inflation over the same years.

We'd say it's a case of "let the reader beware."

- Steve Haynes



## Fund-raisers planned for 125th birthday celebration

Letter to the Editor:

There is a growing air of excitement as plans evolve and come together for the St. Francis 125th Birthday Party. The party will be held on June 14, 15 and 16.

Many fun events are being planned for the weekend that should appeal to all ages.

Our goal, said Robin Burr, one of the organizers, is to make the weekend a fun, low cost weekend to all participants.

As with any event there are expenses. In order to assist with the cost, several fundraising events are being planned. The funds raised will go toward the expenses for the Celebrate St. Francis party.

May 11, a Community-wide Garage Sale will be held in conjunction with the popular St. Francis car show. It will be at the grade school playground from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The committee is seeking donated items to be sold at the sale.

If you would like to donate items, please contact a committee member by May 4. Also, plan on shopping with us that day.

A 50-50 cash drawing is in the works. The money will be split 50-50 between the birthday celebration and the winning ticket holder.

Tickets may be purchased from True Value, Majestic, Bumper to Bumper, Cuppa Joe's, or any fundraising committee member. The drawing will take place on June 15 - Saturday evening of the celebration. You do not need to be present to win.

Check the website or facebook page to see the drawing fund growth and to see the events being planned.

We are also seeking donations. Four levels for donating have been established. They are as follows:

### Letter to the Editor

Silver - \$10 to \$124; 125 Elite -\$125; Gold -\$126 to \$500; - Diamond -\$501+

We will be recognizing businesses and individuals for their generosity. Individual names/business will be listed and recognized throughout the weekend of the celebration. If you wish to remain anonymous, please state so with your donation and we will honor your request.

The committee members will be contacting area businesses and individuals in the next few weeks to seek assistance with the Celebrate St. Francis Party. We are established as a non-profit organization.

If you wish to make a donation, checks should be made out to: "Celebrate St. Francis." Mail donations to: Robin Burr, PO Box 286, St. Francis, KS 67756 or drop donations to any committee member or

take to Majestic Service in care of Kary Meyer.

We are looking forward to visiting with the people and businesses in our area in the next few weeks. It will be the BEST 125 birthday party because of all the wonderful people that have a connection to St. Francis!

If funds should exceed the amount needed for the expenses, then 80 percent of that money will go into the swimming pool fund that has been established by the city of St. Francis and 20 percent will be held back for future St. Francis Heritage Days.

Fundraising Committee members:  
Robin Burr  
Kelsey Andrist  
Cara Hunt  
Dennon Flemming

## Daughter cancels parent's newspaper

Letter to the Editor:

Since my parents, Clarence and Ruth Zimbelman, are no longer alive, I have decided to terminate their subscription to *The Saint Francis Herald*.

Although they moved away from St. Francis in the late 1940s, my mom and dad maintained their subscription to *The Herald* for the entire 66 years of their marriage. They genuinely looked forward to its arrival every week; it helped them to maintain a tie to both their

heritage and their many living relatives over the years.

Even after my mom's mind had faded in the fog of dementia, I could still evoke a spark sometimes while reading her a story from your newspaper. In recent years, she particularly enjoyed the two stories that you did about Dr. Peck and Mr. Greene, the high school principal.

Margot LaPense  
Superior, Colo.

## Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



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There was a day when I believed what the evening news had to say.

My folks thought that Walter Cronkite was giving it to them straight. So why shouldn't I after all?

The Liberals like to use the term, "evolved," when they conveniently change course on a line of reasoning. Therefore I'll state

that my trust in what is portrayed as "news" has evolved into skepticism to say the least.

A case in point, I have a stepbrother who is teaching English at a school that is about a four hour train ride (two hours by bullet train) south of Seoul, South Korea. He tells us that the American media is making a much bigger deal out of the Korean Mis-

sile Crisis than it is.

Sure the people of South Korea are concerned and wary of Kim Jong-un. But his blustering and bravado are nothing new. For them this is the third generation of dangerous and unstable leadership from across their boarder.

My relation says that Americans over there have been told to keep their passports handy, meanwhile students and faculty know where the underground bomb shelters are on campus, which again is standard practice.

But the panic they will leave to the major U.S. networks.

## Honor Roll

New and renewed Herald subscriptions: Steve and Leanna Johnson, El Dorado; Sheryl Pepas, Mesa, Ariz.; Thelma Sherlock, Goodland; Laura Robbins, St. Francis; Shawn Alsup, Sterling, Colo.; Dylan Loyd, St. Francis;

Dawn Zimbal, St. Francis; Harold Mitchell, Burlington, Colo.; John Kamla, Bird City; Dustin Dunn, Wray, Colo.; Dennis Merklin, St. Francis; Victoria Clapper, St. Francis;



GOD SAYS  
And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.  
Galatians 6:9

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St. Francis Equity

St. Francis Herald

Praise the Lord