

After fire destroyed office, paper continued

By Ron Wilson
Director
Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University
 "Stop the presses!" Okay, maybe that phrase is never heard anymore except in old movies. But other newspaper traditions, such as covering breaking news, focusing on local coverage and producing a newspaper on time, still remain in rural Kansas. Today we'll meet a newspaper publisher who rose to the best traditions of Kansas journalists while facing a tremendous challenge: her newspaper office was totally lost in a fire.

Topeka, she came to Kansas and ultimately got a job at the Salina Journal where she worked for nearly 27 years, covering news stories in communities around Salina.

One of those communities was the rural town of Ellsworth, population 2,946 people. Now, that's rural. This town had a shock when its long-time newspaper publisher, Karl Gaston, was killed in a tragic auto accident. Townspeople grieved for the family, and then worried about the sale of their local newspaper.

"A friend of mine and I got the crazy idea that we would try to buy the newspaper," Linda said. They made a bid but a company from Georgia named Morris Multimedia bought the paper instead. Still, Linda and her friend were so intrigued by the community that they decided to create a competing newspaper

to serve Ellsworth. The Ellsworth County Independent was born.

"The workload was incredible and the competition was stiff," Linda said. Ultimately, Linda's partner went back to Salina but Linda continued to produce the paper. Then she was approached by the owners of the newspaper chain about a merger, which was finalized in 2001. Linda became editor and co-owner of the Ellsworth County Independent-Reporter.

"They've been great," Linda said of Morris Multimedia. "They don't interfere and they've been very supportive."

Then came Sunday, June 19, 2011. Linda was home when she got a call from her business manager, whose husband is a firefighter.

"I think she was trying to ease me into what had happened," Linda

said. "She told me, 'There's a fire downtown at Douglas and Second Street.' I was trying to think, 'Hmm, what building is that?'" And then it hit her - that's her own newspaper's building.

By the time Linda got downtown, there were smoke and flames shooting through the top of the newspapers' building. An attorney in the next block was carrying files out of his office in case the fire spread.

But firefighters came from all over and contained the fire. "The firefighters did a remarkable job," Linda said. For the newspaper staff, this was not only a huge loss, it was a news story to cover.

Linda and her staff swung into action, taking pictures and interviewing people. Meanwhile, Linda was thinking about how to produce a newspaper. Her first call was to the

school superintendent to ask about using the high school journalism department, and he didn't hesitate to agree. Fortunately, Linda had the page templates on her laptop computer which she had with her at home.

The next morning, the executive director and the president of the Kansas Press Association were in Ellsworth to help. Offers of assistance came from all over. Remarkably, that week's edition of the Ellsworth County Independent-Reporter was produced on time, as it has been ever since.

"I'm so proud of our staff," Linda said. "There was never a thought that we wouldn't put out a newspaper that week. And I can't say enough good about the support we have received from the community."

"Linda's coverage of her community is amazing. I am especially impressed with her positive attitude - even through a very challenging year," said Gloria Freeland, director of Kansas State's Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media. "Linda has provided leadership for other community newspapers through the excellent example she sets for her own."

"Stop the presses!" Okay, maybe that phrase isn't used any more, but the traditions of local coverage and on-time publication still remain. We commend Linda Mowery-Denning and all those involved with the Ellsworth County Independent-Reporter for making a difference by demonstrating that, in rural Kansas, even a fire isn't enough to stop the presses.

Ranch management seminar to be held in six locations around state

Ranch management and cow herd economics will take center stage at Kansas State University's Winter Ranch Management Seminar is planned for six locations around the state and features a combination of local speakers and webinar presen-

tation delivery.

Seminar locations include Ashland, Highland, Lebanon, Manhattan, Parsons and Russell. All will start with registration at 3 p.m. (Mountain Time) (program beginning at 3:30 p.m.) and end at 7:30

p.m. (Mountain Time).

Featured speakers include Trey Patterson of Padlock Ranch, Dayton, Wyo., who will present "Ranch Management Focus" and Glynn Tonsor, Kansas State Research and Extension agricultural econo-

mist, who will give the "Cattle Business Outlook." Both of these presentations will be delivered via webinar.

Local speakers at each location will give presentations on winter ration development and hunting

lease management.

The cost to attend, which include dinner, is \$25 per person. Registration is due by Friday, Jan. 6. If more than one person attends from any farm, family or business, the price for additional attendees at \$15 per

person.

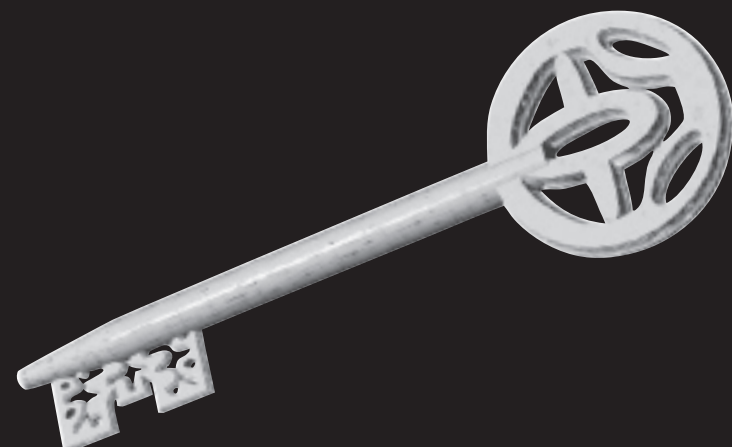
Information about each location, plus online registration is available at www.asi.ksu.edu/rms. Information is also available by contacting Becky Ayres at (785) 532-1281 or bayres@ksu.edu.

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