



# Nebraska

NEWSPAPER

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## Newspapers share resources in fire coverage

By Kent Broyhill  
Editor, *Nebraska Newspaper*

The fine art of sharing and helping others, those noble traits that our industry is known for, was again exemplified among papers in the Nebraska panhandle.

"I drove out to look. I spotted five fires and immediately contacted the *Star-Herald* in Scottsbluff," said Brian Kuhn of the *Hemingford Ledger*.

Kuhn went on to say, "It's fair time and we're spread thin. Steve Fredrick of the *Star-Herald* offered to share stories with us." Kuhn also personally helped to initiate a supply drive to fill the fire department in Harrison with basic necessities.

It didn't stop there. Chadron State College Director of Information, Con Marshall, shared photos with the *Star-Herald* newspaper and the *World-Herald* web site. *Nebraska Farm Bureau* magazine received photos from the *Hemingford Ledger*.

Kuhn and the folks at KCOW Radio in Alliance shared information back and forth and the KCSR Chadrad.com radio web site set up photo and video galleries from listeners and other media to enhance their fire coverage.

Dennis Brown, KCSR station owner, said, "We normally receive 6,000 - 10,000 visits per day to our website. At 400,000 hits per hour the system went down for about four hours and took 300 customers with it. Mobius Communications of Hemmingford offered us some of their bandwidth to put up our photo galleries.

The *Chadron Record* posted photos to their web site and shared information with other media. *Record* publisher George Ledbetter stated, "I got evacuated from the area while I was trying to take pictures. The *World-Herald* was good about



Photo by Gail DeBusse Potter

The Cross and the Cloud: Smoke billows from the Dawes County Fire. The cross is located in a small cemetery behind the Museum of the Fur Trade near Chadron.

making aerial photos available."

"We lost three homes on the south side of town and the fire department made a valiant stand at the edge of the Chadron State football field." Ledbetter stated. He also referenced Con Marshall's efforts to share photos with other entities.

John Weare, editor of the *Alliance Times-Herald*, said their paper cov-

ered the fires and assisted with information provided to the Red Cross and the high school. The Alliance school opened their doors where food, water and showers were made available. The pool and theater were also open to people needing relief.

Diane Clark, *Crawford Clipper* pub-

*Continued on page 3*

## NPA v. Stuart still the guiding law of the land

By Russ Gifford  
NPA staff writer

Think western Nebraska is an unlikely setting for cutting edge First Amendment cases? Think again. Thirty years ago this summer, the Nebraska Press Association won an important appeal before the Supreme Court of the United States.

Since the case was handed down by a unanimous Court decision in June of 1976, *NPA v. Stuart* has become the standard test for prior restraint of newspapers versus freedom of speech and publication.

"The problems presented by this case are almost as old as the Republic," stated then-Chief Justice Warren Burger, writing for the majority in the case. Between 1973 and 1976, U. S. Courts had issued 170 orders restricting the press. The Supreme Court used this case to clearly draw the line.

All nine justices agreed "prior restraints on speech and publication are the most serious and the least tolerable infringement on First Amendment rights."

The subject of the case was a District Court gag-rule issued by Judge Hugh Stuart as part of one of Nebraska's most horrific murder cases. Attorneys for both sides had asked the judge to restrict press coverage in an effort to ensure a fair trial for Erwin Simants, accused of murdering a family of six in Sutherland, Neb.

At issue was the fact that Judge Stuart's order prevented informa-

*Continued on page 5*

# Editors urged to 'get involved' in education

By Russ Gifford  
NPA staff writer

The single best indicator of whether someone votes in elections is whether he or she reads a newspaper. That's according to Martin P. Wattenberg, in his book "Where Have All the Voters Gone?"

Now that you know you are vital to American democracy, what are you going to do next?

At the annual gathering of the nation's newspaper publishers in Chicago, publishers were urged to sit down with politicians and school principals and discuss a way out of the resulting descending spiral.

America has the world's highest rate of bachelor's degrees - but also a lower percentage of people that scan a newspaper daily than other countries. Since the result is fewer voters, and fewer newspaper readers, Thomas Geoghegan, attor-

ney, and James Warren, a Chicago Tribune deputy managing editor, contend it is important to make changes to ensure the survival of both institutions.

Warren and Geoghegan suggest:  
• **Re-invigorate the Newspapers in Education program.**

Not as a marketing plan, but with the real intent of getting students to read newspapers.

• **Revisit your marketing and promotion efforts.**

Consider your content and your web premise, and evaluate them as doorways or barriers.

• **Most important: get involved.**

Talk with principals and local school boards, and explain the connection between newspapers and voting. Push for a new public education. "It's the democratic thing to do - and the industry's best hope to stay alive," contend the authors.

— from the *Chicago Tribune* and *Wisconsin Newspaper Association*

## Telling the story: Weekly newspapers on the fire

It was a wrong number, but it alerted *Midland News* editor Laura Vroman all the same. "It was Sunday," said Vroman. "I was at home, I'd just showered, and was doing laundry when the call came. 'How ya doing, hon?' said a voice I didn't recognize." It was the first Vroman had heard about the fire, and that she was in the evacuation path.

Days later, still in the same Red Wings t-shirt, though now "a blackened, sooty mess," Vroman was standing with one foot in a pile of still-smoldering ash photographing Gov. Heineman's visit to the scene of the fire. Between that first call and the photo, says Vroman, "was bedlam. Evacuees going one way, firefighters heading the other, all criss-crossing." The key was to stay out of their way, but still cover the story.

Is getting a breaking story like this one all that important in a weekly paper? Chadron *Record* editor George Ledbetter, who was also evacuated along with his family in the face of the advancing Chadron fire, says yes. He notes that in times of tense situations, "people tend to talk to, maybe even *need* to talk to reporters more." People want to tell their stories and share them with others. "And storytelling is our business," says Ledbetter. "We just call it news."

### NPA v. Stuart

continued from Page 1

tion that occurred in an open court room from being printed in newspapers, or repeated on television or radio. Simants had confessed, and spoke about the crime and his confession during an open pre-trial hearing.

The case, appealed by the Nebraska Press Association, moved quickly through the Nebraska Supreme Court, which upheld the

gag order. Their reasoning placed the defendant's right to a fair trial — guaranteed in the Sixth Amendment — over the freedom of the press, a right outlined in the First Amendment.

Again, the NPA appealed, and the U.S. Supreme Court granted a rapid hearing and response. The highest court ruled in favor of the NPA, and more importantly created a landmark case that outlined the test that any future First Amendment gag order would need to achieve.

Thirty years later, the test is still the law of the land.

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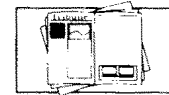
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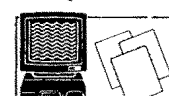
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