

EXTRA

END OF AN ERA FOR NEWSPAPER CARRIERS

Newspaper industry continues to change over 125 years



Photos by Erica Dischino / West Central Tribune

Newspaper carrier Dave Ahl, top, prepares to load newspapers into his vehicle Tuesday evening at the West Central Tribune building in Willmar. Newspaper carrier Lee Meyer, left, delivers a West Central Tribune newspaper around midnight on Wednesday morning to a household in Pennock. Newspaper carrier Corey Gallagher, right, picks up a prepared newspaper bundle to load into his car before he goes on his evening and early morning routes Tuesday evening at the West Central Tribune building in Willmar.

By Carolyn Lange
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Willmar

About 10 minutes after the last edit is made on the day-long work of sales representatives, reporters, photographers, editors and designers, the massive printing press at the West Central Tribune starts a methodical drum beat as it churns out printed pages for the next day's paper.

ONLINE

See the video at www.wctrib.com.

The applied ink quickly dries and in a mesmerizing mechanical process the pages are collated and folded before chugging down the conveyor belt and into the mailroom.

A handful of employees gather a specific number of papers into a stack and place it in a guillotine-looking device — actually called a strapper — that whips a plastic strap around each bundle with the speed and force of a viper's tongue.

Some of the bundles have a dozen papers and some of the bundles have 50 or more, depending on which route they

are to be delivered.

The quick pace is impressive, especially considering that it's 11:30 p.m. — a time when most people are in bed.

Meanwhile — outside on a warm June evening — Corey Gallagher backs his vehicle into one of the two mailroom garage bays.

Lee Meyer parks his vehicle off to the side and wanders over to chat with Gallagher through the open car window.

Shortly afterward, Carmen Evans, Dave Ahl and Kevin Law pull into the parking lot and wander into the bay.

They trade some laughs and catch up on news from their lives.

Ahl and his wife have a 3½-acre vegetable farm near Atwater and are busy at farmers markets. Evans, who has a woodshop at her Willmar home, asks if Meyer installed the shelves she made for his man cave in DeGraff.

They are all members of the team of West Central Tribune carriers and drivers who complete the process of getting the news to subscribers by actually delivering the newspaper.

Behind the scenes at the West Central Tribune

It's a job that starts around 11 p.m. and ends around 5:30 to 6:30 a.m. with hundreds of miles driven each night as thousands of copies of the West Central Tribune are put on doorsteps, into tubes at the end of driveways or dropped off at grocery stores and gas stations, or left at other locations to be picked up by other contractors who make the final home delivery.

Meyer, who is 82 and had a career as an over-the-road trucker, has been a newspaper carrier for 6½ years. "I'm a night person. I love it," said Meyer, who said he's hit 40 deer while making deliveries on his 217-mile daily trek. He claims that 30 of the deer "hit me."

Law, another "night owl," said he loves everything about the job. "I get to take a midnight cruise every night," he said. Evans said she started delivering papers in 2007 on foot with a walking route in Willmar and in 2009 took a 136-mile nightly driving route that has included several white-knuckle winter drives, including one when she spent

the entire night stranded on the edge of a snow-filled road. The papers still got delivered.

"It's my job," said Evans. "People depend on that newspaper and depend on knowing (their) paper is going to be there in the morning."

All the carriers said the customers who receive the home delivery make the job special, with greeting cards and warm words exchanged over the years.

That all ends July 3 — the last day the carriers will deliver the West Central Tribune.

Changing history

The West Central Tribune, which was initially called the Willmar Tribune when it was started in 1895, is celebrating its 125th birthday this year.

For most of those years the paper was delivered six days a week — not on Sundays.

In 2018 the Tribune stopped printing a physical paper on Mondays to reduce expenses, with daily electronic editions available to subscribers.

The economic hardships caused by COVID-19 has affected many businesses, which has in turn drastically reduced the

amount of money they spend on advertising with the paper.

In response to that lost revenue, starting the week of July 6, the West Central Tribune will deliver just two print papers every week — on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

A paper, with fresh news, letters to editors, obituaries and advertisements, will still be created six days a week and available in the e-edition format, on non-print days.

The twice-a-week printed papers will be delivered in the U.S. mail, eliminating the need for carriers to deliver papers to individuals on their routes.

It's another significant change in the newspaper industry, and one that tugs at the heartstrings for those who deliver the news and those who receive it.

The image of a cap-clad boy on a street corner holding a newspaper above his head shouting "Extra! Extra! Read all about it" is part of American history.

Many adults in their 60s had early morning or after-school paper routes when they were kids.

CARRIERS: Page B7

ENGAGEMENTS

Roering & Hansen

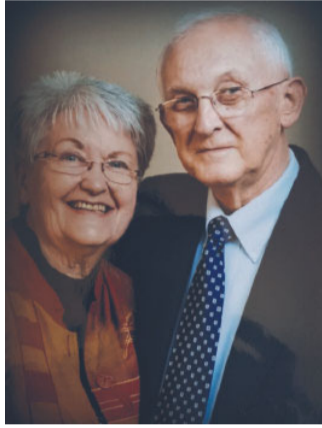
Megan J Roering and Eric P Hansen announce their Engagement.

Ms. Roering is the daughter of Bernie and Lonnie Roering of Long Prairie, MN. She is a 2006 Long Prairie Grey Eagle High School graduate and a 2007 and 2011 Alexandria Technical College graduate. She is the Pope Douglas Solid Waste Mgmt Office Manager Assistant.

Mr. Hansen is the son of Pete and Kathy Hansen of Brooten, MN. He is a 2006 Belgrade Brooten Elrosa graduate and a 2012 Ridgewater College of Willmar graduate. He is a certified Auto Body Tech with Countryside Bodyshop.



ANNIVERSARIES



Rierson's 60th Wedding Anniversary

It all started with a blind date on Halloween. Two farm kids: an Atwater girl, and a Kandiyohi boy. Married in Atwater June 25, 1960, with peonies, a hand-made dress, family and friends. For a time, settled in Willmar, then in 8 other states, while along the way bringing to the world three kids and 4 grandkids, before returning to Willmar for retirement. We, your children and grandchildren, wish you a very happy celebration of 60 years together! We are thankful for the loving home you created for us, the wisdom you gave us, and the many happy memories we share. Friends and family are invited to share their congratulations with Clint and Sharron.

MILESTONES POLICY

Every Saturday, the West Central Tribune's "Milestones" section shares with readers the news of family "Milestones," such as engagements, weddings, anniversaries, birthdays, reunions, new babies and more.

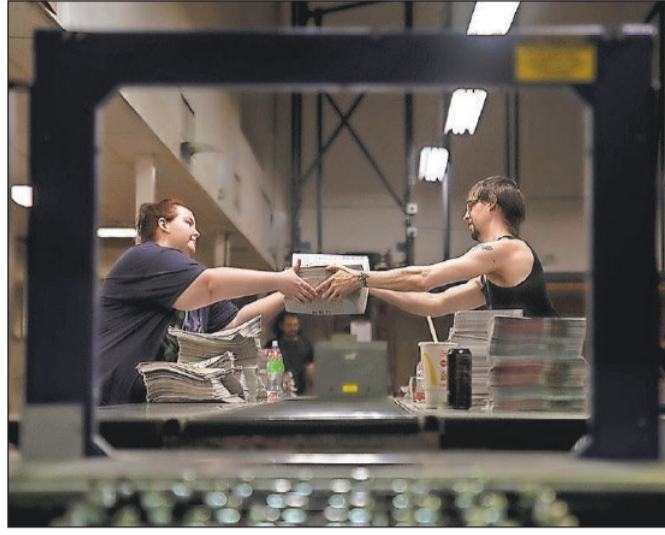
Publication fees are \$30 for wedding and engagements, and \$25 for all other "Milestones"

announcements.

To submit your Milestone news go to fccmilestones.com and click on the "Share your Milestones" story.

For more information, contact our Tribune Content Services at 1-866-910-9009 or email milestones@wctrib.com.

The deadline for a Saturday edition is noon Wednesday.



Photos by Erica Dischino / West Central Tribune

Clockwise, from top left: Newspaper carrier Lee Meyer loads newspapers into the trunk of his van before he goes on his evening and early morning routes Tuesday evening at the West Central Tribune building in Willmar. Newspaper carrier Carmen Evans stands in front of a sign that lists her delivery route locations Tuesday evening at the West Central Tribune building. Employees Cassandra Green, left, and Billy Cloutier prepare newspapers for carriers before they go on their evening and early morning routes Tuesday evening. Newspaper carriers Kevin Law, left, and Corey Gallagher hang out as they wait for more newspapers to load in their vehicles.

CARRIERS

From Page B8

About 17 years ago there were 180 newspaper carriers delivering about 18,000 copies of the West Central Tribune in a 45-mile radius of Willmar, said Nate Schueller, circulation manager. Most of the carriers were kids except for the rural motor routes, he said.

But, as the number of subscriptions declined, the routes got too large for carriers to walk and the routes were delivered by nearly 80 adults in vehicles. Today, the daily circulation is 6,800 on weekdays and 7,500 on weekends and there are 31 carriers, according to Schueller.

In the transition to a new distribution model in July, contractors will haul papers to local post offices as well as

local convenience stores and supermarkets for single copy purchases on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Miss the job

While grabbing the bundles for their specific routes as they come out of the mailroom, Meyer, Evans, Ahl, Law and Gallagher talked about what they like about their job and why they will miss making the home deliveries of the newspaper.

More in-depth telephone interviews were conducted with Meyer and Evans.

"I'm going to miss the people, the other carriers," said Meyer. "Wonderful people."

Meyer said he's got the

"best" route with the "best" customers. He said he and his wife have become friends with some of the people on his route and have had weekend coffee-time visits with them. After sending his customers a letter letting them know he wouldn't be delivering their paper anymore, they responded with thoughtful thank you cards, said Meyer.

Evans, while choking back tears, said she wants her customers to know how much their generosity — and that they "kept subscribing to the paper for all those years" — meant to her.

"It's sad that newspapers are struggling," she said. "It's really the end of serendipitous knowledge."

You can only Google things you already know."

Evans also gave a nod of thanks to law enforcement. "On those dark stormy nights, I knew they were out there with me. that I wasn't all alone out there," she said.

At 63, Evans said she'll likely retire and — one to look for the silver linings in life — spend more time with her woodworking projects.

"It's going to be a change. Financially it's going to be tough," she said. "But after 10 years of driving six to seven hours a night in all kinds of weather, it'll probably be a good thing to get out of the car for a while."

"I hate to see the paper go away," said Law. "It was fun while it lasted."



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To show our support, Forum Communications has established a one million dollar matching grant fund to assist locally-owned businesses during this most challenging time. We are committed to helping our locally-owned businesses reach their customers. We invite all to apply today for a matching marketing dollars grant.

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Nominate the West Central areas Best of the Best! Nominations begin June 15th

Write in your favorite Dining, Arts, Entertainment, Sports, Recreational, Products and Services of West Central Minnesota!



Best of the Best contest replaces previous Readers Choice contest

www.wctrib.com