

To: Minnesota Newspaper Association
From: Korrie Wenzel
Re: Lynn Smith Community Leadership Award
Date: Sept. 29, 2020

Please consider this my nomination of the Grand Forks Herald for the Lynn Smith Leadership Award.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first struck the U.S., it took time before the reality hit here in the Midwest. We were isolated somewhat as numbers grew on the coasts. In mid-March, however, the reality became all too clear: the virus was going to bring great disruption to every aspect of local business.

In the early days, we spent considerable hours wondering how we could salvage something that resembled regular business at the Herald. By the third week of March, we made a decision: We would stop worrying so much about our own finances and worry more about the finances of other businesses in the communities of Grand Forks and East Grand Forks.

We devised a multi-part plan:

First: Each day, we published an online list of local businesses, allowing them to tell our readers if they are open, their hours of business and what services they are offering during the pandemic. We partnered with the Chamber of Commerce on this project, which led to a great influx of participation. Soon, that list topped 2,600 words. And, again, we published it online every day and every few weeks in print. We did not charge the participants, and we updated their information daily (provided they asked for updates).

Second: We created a series titled "Retail Reacts," writing 300- to 500-word stories dedicated to telling our readers the special things businesses are doing to remain open and viable during the pandemic. It allowed businesses to discuss, for instance, how they have adopted new delivery methods, or new special sales, etc. Again, we did not charge for this. All told, we published 24 segments over the course of five weeks.

Third: We asked local church leaders to submit pieces for what we called "Encouraging Words." Not only has our area suffered from the effects of COVID-19, but businesses also were hit by a retail recession and a farm crisis. Our concern was that without some sort of encouragement or hope, we could see a spate of suicides in the region. Overall, 12 religious leaders took up our offer to submit pieces of 400 words. These published, with a photo of the author, in large packages on our editorial pages.

Fourth: We devised a series of PSA advertisements that encouraged readers to take certain actions during the pandemic. Overall, we ran 25 free ads in bright blue colors, reminding readers to shop local, order takeout, thank their health-care workers or, several times, to participate in contests to enjoy lunch "on the Herald."

Examples of the ad copy included "Save a local business. Order takeout." ... "Doesn't takeout for dinner sound like a good idea?" ... "Local businesses will deliver. Stay home." ... "Have pizza on the Herald. \$25 gift card to Deek's Pizza" (and then we award it to, say, the 25th caller between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m.).

These all ran on Page 1.

On March 19, we wrote an editorial titled "Important to eat, buy and tip local" and on May 7 an editorial titled "Healthcare: You need it, it needs you."

Thank you for your consideration.

Korrie Wenzel
Publisher