C1 Saturday, September 19, 2020 West Central Tribune

ĽXTRA **STOP THE PRESS!** LITERALLY ► To see the press run, see video at wctrib.com

Manager Chris Peterson checks how the newspaper is printing as the presses begin to run Tuesday evening at the West Central Tribune building in Willmar. Starting next week, the paper will be printed in Sioux Falls, S.D., and trucked back to Willmar to be delivered to subscribers by mail. Photos by Erica Dischino / West Central Tribune



After 125 years, the West Central Tribune will no longer be printed in Willmar

By Carolyn Lange clange@wctrib.com Willmar or most of the day, the behemoth known as the Goss Community offset press sits like a sleeping dragon in the pressroom at the West Central Tribune. During the daylight hours, caretakers pump grease into more than 260 zerks, keep the 65 gallons of oil that feeds the 58-foot-long by 14-foothigh machine flowing and maintain the two 75-horse-power motors that power it.

Three men with 55 years of experience between them fill ink wells with



globs of shiny, gooey cyan, magenta and yellow ink that comes in small buckets. The black ink is delivered by a semi and is stored in a big tank.

The crew maneuvers rolls of paper that weigh 750- to 1,050-pounds into the belly of the beast and then gently weave it through a maze of rollers and belts to create a delicate, yet amazingly sturdy paper web.

PRESS STOPS: Page C2

ABOVE RIGHT: Press operator Klayton Haugen, left, and manager Chris Peterson take a look at a plate used to print the contents of Wednesday's newspaper Tuesday evening at the West Central Tribune building in Willmar.

RIGHT: Press operator John Johannsen waits for the press run to begin.

PRINTING PRESS FACTS AND FIGURES

News 7days a week

► The Tribune has printed a newspaper in Willmar since 1895.

► The paper moved from downtown Willmar to the Industrial Park in 1980, switching from hot lead operations to a Goss Community offset press.

► Starting Sept. 22 the West Central Tribune will be printed in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and delivered to customers via the U.S. Postal Service on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

► The Tribune's e-paper and website, wctrib.com, will continue to be published seven days a week.

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Big machine

► The Goss Community printing press is 58-feet-long by 14-feet-high

- ► More than 260 zerks are greased weekly
- ▶ 65 gallons of oil are used for the press and folder
- ► It is powered by two 75-horse-power motors
- ► The 32-inch wide rolls of paper weigh 1,050 pounds each
- ► The 23-inch wide rolls of paper weigh 750 pounds each
- ► At peak speeds, the press can print 21,000 papers in an hour
- ► Typically the press runs at 17,500 papers in an hour
- ► The press can produce 24 full pages with eight pages of full color
- ► The press can produce 48 tab-sized pages with 16 pages of full color



Tools used to stir and refill ink rest on the press.



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Extra



begins to run.



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At about 10:30 p.m. the dragon starts to wake up as floppy 35-inch by 23-inch sheets of aluminum — which have laser images of the photos and words of local news stories, ads for area businesses, opinions expressed by neighbors and legal government announcements are attached to plate cylinders.

The energy starts to pick up as workers file into the mailroom and pressroom manager Chris Peterson waits for the final stories to be edited and pages to be designed. It could be the sports department working on last-minute scores or the news department waiting on election results.

When the final story is done the last aluminum plate is snapped into place.

At 11:45 p.m. a jarring alarm bell blasts and the dragon starts to heave and bellow.

At first, the long roll of paper feeds slowly through the maze as Peterson and his crew look to make sure the colors and alignment are correct and the tension on the web is just right.

As the speed accelerates to a pace that can generate 17,500 completed newspapers in one hour, the men quickly dart into ground-level units to turn ink keys and then jump up on ladders to adjust colors on the

upper-level plates. The men — who seem grumbles back to sleep. On Friday night the dragon took its last breath. If you're reading this

story in a printed copy of the West Central Tribune, rather than online or in the e-edition of the paper, you are holding the last issue of the paper to be printed in Willmar.

After 125 years, there will no longer be a printing press operating at the West Central Tribune.

Industry changes

"Friday night will be the end of an era for our printing facility," said Publisher Steve Ammermann.

Since 1985 the newspaper has been printed in Willmar. The West Central Tribune was sold to Forum Communications Company in 1979 and moved from its downtown Willmar office to the Willmar Industrial Park in 1980, when the company purchased a Goss Community offset press, said Ammermann. "We've printed in this

location for the past 40 years," he said.

"The closing of our print facility has nothing to do with the condition of our equipment or the work performed every night by our hard-working and loyal employees in the pressroom and mailroom," he said.

They kept the presses rolling every day, year after year. In my 39 years here, I can't remember a day we ever failed to get a newspaper out."

Economic hardships



Press operator John Johannsen climbs down a ladder on the press before it Press operator Klayton Haugen gathers an imaged plate produced by a platemaker to hang on the press.



Press operator Klayton Haugen works the press Tuesday evening at the West Central Tribune building in Willmar.



with sauness, ne salu. "To the end of its final

won't be, and that comes You have to learn to do when you're printing, at least on this particular press.'



Photos by Erica Dischino / West Central Tribune

ABOVE: A press operator inches the press along as operators check registration for the printing of Wednesday's paper.

LEFT: Manager Chris Peterson, from left, and operators John Johannsen and Klayton Haugen wait for more pages of the newspaper to be submitted near deadline Tuesday evening at the West Central Tribune building in Willmar.

> machine," he said. "And there's probably another 10 or 15 years in it, I bet." Unfortunately, the press will have a premature death. It will be decommissioned and parts may be sold to another print facility, said Ammermann. When asked what it'll be like when he shuts down the press for the last time Friday night Peterson quickly grew quiet. With hands in his pockets and rocking gently back-and-forth on his feet, Peterson's eyes were rimmed with tears. "A little sad," he said, turning away.

to be half artists and half mechanics — repeatedly grab a completed, folded newspaper from the conveyor belt, open it up to look at the quality of the print on a certain page and then dash into - and on top of — the machine again and again to make more adjustments.

This dance goes on until the proper number of papers are printed, the switch is turned off and the dragon slowly

caused by COVID-19 and new technology are the reasons Ammermann cited for the company's decision to print the Tribune and the Reminder at one of Forum Communication Company's regional printing plants in Sioux Falls, S.D.

The change means lower production costs, said Ammermann.

"The mission to report and inform readers is still local, but the printing

run on Friday night, the pressroom stood apart as iconic, timeless and a fascination to employees and visitors." Ammermann said. "It was the engine room of the operation where the paper was forged."

Like a friend

Peterson has worked in the pressroom for 22 years, tending to the needs of the Goss Community press.

"I call it backwards and upside down when you're printing," he said. "The plates are hung and the images are upside down.

LEFT: Press operator Klayton Haugen presets ink settings on the press.

BELOW: Chris

Peterson hangs a plate on the press. This plate will provide a blueprint for printing the yellow ink on a page for Wednesday's paper.



Making it work well is a "learned skill," he said. "You can't get anybody off the street to do it.'

John Johannsen has worked in the pressroom for 15 years. "Best job I ever had," he said. "I'm going to miss a lot of it. I wish it could've hung on a little longer. It's pretty hard."

Kyle Augustson, a grandson of O.B. Augustson, who was publisher for the West Central Tribune from 1940-1979, has been the warehouse coordinator for the last five years.

the third generation Augustson to work here," said Augustson, who remembers being in his grandfather's office when he was a kid.

"It's pretty neat being

Augustson's job is being eliminated because of the change. "It's going to be tough. I've had nothing but good times working here," he said. "I enjoyed the people I work with. It's just going to be sad to leave."

Peterson said the massive printing press is like a reliable, hardworking friend with "little quirks" and it's own "character" that has never let the Tribune down. "It's quite the industrial

"It's the end of an era."

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