

AN ECHO PRESS EDITORIAL

Newspapers are most trusted source of news

The media has long been a favorite punching bag. But there's good news about the industry, especially for newspapers. People are still turning to newspapers to get their news and they trust the information they're getting. Also, newspaper readers are voters — voters who are hungry for professional integrity.

That's according to a March survey of 1,000 adults from rural and urban communities across the U.S. conducted for the National Newspaper Association.

In monitoring current events and political updates, community newspapers continue to grow in trustworthiness (7.38 on a scale of 1 to 10) and newspaper readers are voters (96%).

Highlights from the survey: **Voting.** There does, in fact, exist a strong correlation between those who read community newspapers and those who cast ballots in elections. A combined 96% of readers of local newspapers specifically (769 out of the 1,001 total sample), say they plan to vote this November — either "very" or "somewhat" likely.

Overall, 89% of the respondents said they are "very likely" to vote in upcoming elections this year for U.S. Congress, U.S. Senate and other federal and state elections, 6% said "somewhat likely" and 4% said "not at all likely."

Trust. The study found local newspapers as the most "trusted" source (of all mediums tested) when it comes to learning about candidates for public office. On a 10-point scale (with 10 being the highest), local newspapers are rated a 7.38, higher than TV stations (6.45), radio (5.58), political mailings (4.63) or social media platforms (2.65).

This compares to 2019, when on the issue of trustworthiness, community newspapers represented a more trusted news source (5.77 on a 10-point scale) than other news sources, rating higher than national network TV news (5.13), cable TV news shows (4.60) and all others. Social media sources like Twitter or Facebook were rated lowest, at 2.92.

"It seems to us," said Jim Lee, president of Susquehanna Polling and Research, Inc., which

did the survey for the NNA, "that voters are increasingly hungry for a higher level of professional integrity when it comes to journalism (both local and national) in today's age of constant cable TV news and partisan leaning news media outlets."

"Although the metrics and items in our list have changed from prior years, prior years also shows trust in community newspapers had consistently received higher mean scores than competitor sources," Lee added. "Moreover, readers of community newspapers rate trust in their local papers at an even higher 7.83 on a 10-point scale."

News habits. A combined 77% of respondents say they read a newspaper that covers their local community (a slight increase from a 65% average, 2017-2019), consumed via printed edition and online edition, as well as these additional online options that were not in previous surveys: Facebook, YouTube, TikTok or other social media platforms.

Newspapers, as a medium used either as a "primary" or "secondary" source of information, has held steady over the years. In the current poll, a combined 24% say they rely on newspapers as either their primary or secondary source of information for news.

Local newspapers also continue to receive high metrics on things like "[it] informs me" (93% agree), "[it] provides valuable local shopping and advertising info (81% agree), and "my household relies on [it] for local news (83%)."

The state of the first amendment. A combined 96% say it's very or somewhat important to have reliability and truth in local journalism, including 83% who think it's "very" important.

Advertising. Community newspapers continue to be the most-trusted information medium and the go-to source for shopping decisions. Of the respondents, 43% cited the local newspaper as their top resource for making shopping decisions.

The survey underscores the point that newspapers are still highly relevant and are a trusted source for news with a bright future ahead.

LETTERS

Lenient sentences handed out in Douglas County

To the editor:

We listened with interest to the Senate confirmation hearings for Judge Jackson, and although we aren't Republicans, we share the concerns expressed by many senators about the lenient sentences given to purveyors of child pornography.

Jackson testified numerous times that she couldn't answer the Republican's questions without first reviewing the presentencing reports of the cases. Maddening, perplexing, and perhaps telling was the Democrat's subsequent reluctance to then enter such reports into the official proceedings to that end, claiming that they wanted to "protect the victims." When Texas Cold Snap Senator Ted Cruz suggested that the sensitive and identifying information could easily be redacted, they acted as though they didn't hear him. Perhaps nobody had a "Sharpie" handy.

More alarming, is that one needs not to look as far away as our nation's capital to observe such abortions of justice. Even lighter sentences are being handed down to similar offenders here in Douglas County. Sweet plea bargains, and sentences as light as 45 days of house arrest are being recommended for similar creeps by County Attorney Chad Larson.

Perhaps local Republicans and the members of our press, who are equally concerned with such matters, should be reviewing local presentencing reports and other court records, and working harder

to find a suitable replacement for our county attorney. His record of lenient sentencing recommendations disqualifies him from continuing to represent the decent citizens of Douglas County.

Judd and Wendy Hoff
Alexandria, MN

Did Trump really call Putin's invasion of Ukraine genius?

To the editor:

When John Messenger's letter appeared in the Echo Press on Wednesday, March 30, he wrote that Trump had called "Putin's brutal and illegal invasion of a sovereign nation 'genius'."

I am not a Trump fan, but could he actually have said that Putin's invasion of Ukraine was a "genius" decision? So I Googled that question.

Here are Trump's words taken from the transcript of a radio interview on The Clay Travis and Buck Sexton show on February 22:

TRUMP: "I went in yesterday and there was a television screen, and I said, 'This is genius.' Putin declares a big portion of the Ukraine — of Ukraine. Putin declares it as independent. Oh, that's wonderful. So, Putin is now saying, 'It's independent.' A large section of Ukraine. I said, 'How smart is that?'"

Was he, in fact, saying that the invasion was "genius," or was he saying something else? I'm not sure, but it's too easy to take information from various news sources, get "primed" and "triggered" then make assumptions without checking for facts.

Ruthie Schultz
Alexandria, MN

COVID cloud lifts at college

Spring at Alexandria Technical and Community College is always an exciting time. Not only are we thawing out with the rest of the community, we are also preparing to celebrate this year's graduates at our biggest event of the year — commencement. This year's commencement, however, is an extra special occasion.

We will have our first in-person commencement since 2019 at the Runestone Community Center on Wednesday, May 11 at 1 p.m. and we are excited to welcome families, friends and the community to join us to celebrate the accomplishments of our graduates.

While we have done our best as a college to provide as much normalcy to students as possible throughout the pandemic, almost all of this spring's graduates will have only known a college experience that included COVID. They have endured mask requirements; physical distancing; and other safety protocols to continue with primarily in-person classes.

Students have found a new normal through platforms like Zoom and online group work. Our faculty also adapted, pivoting as needed and teaching remotely to get students across the finish line. In early March, we removed the campus mask requirement in alignment with the Minnesota State system schools. In late March, we experienced our first COVID-free week in two years with zero new cases reported among our students and employees.

Looking ahead, this year's graduating high school seniors will be entering a post-pandemic college experience that will be vastly different from their high school experience. Our graduates



MICHAEL SEYMOUR
In the Know

will enter workplaces with varied post-pandemic protocols.

Fall will be different for our returning students as well. We anticipate for the better. In the fall, we will welcome students to campus with a robust student life experience and the inaugural seasons of Legends Volleyball, Men's and Women's Soccer, and Men's Baseball.

The higher education landscape has gone through substantial change in the last two years. Even prior to COVID, higher education was experiencing change and demands for innovation in how we teach and how students learn. The student body has also changed with fewer high school graduating students, more delaying college and directly entering the workforce, and more diverse student needs. Throughout the country, enrollments have declined under the cloud of COVID and now as we come out the other side, colleges and universities have their sights set on regrowth.

At Alexandria College, we are extremely proud of the work we have done to continue with stable enrollments through difficult times. Our sights, too, are set on future growth through our strategic planning. We are in a better place than most. Enrollment, however, only tells part of our story.

Our job as a college is not only to enroll students. More importantly, it is to prepare and graduate students ready to join the workforce or continue with their academic goals and aspirations. With more than 700 graduates

per year, this is an area where we excel. Alexandria College has among the highest graduation rates and job placement rates in the state, which is part of what makes us Minnesota's Best Community College according to three national rankings.

Last year, we graduated students from Minnesota and the five-state region, and as far away as Virginia, California, Arizona, Washington, North Carolina, and Illinois. Contributing to some of Minnesota's highest workforce needs, this spring we anticipate an estimated 60 law enforcement graduates, 100 health services graduates and 30 professional truck drivers, in addition to those who have or will receive certificates through the free Certified Nursing Assistant program that was offered this spring through our Retraining, Academic Instruction, and Skills Enhancement (RAISE) initiative with funding support from Douglas County and the State of Minnesota.

Founder Vernon Maack's business model still holds: "Find 'em, Teach 'em, Place 'em." Alexandria College consistently follows and successfully executes this approach today. Historically, job placement rates for our graduates are 98%. This year's graduates are in very high demand.

As we reflect on our graduates, we would like to thank a past graduate who has supported the college for many years. State Sen. Bill Ingebrigtsen has announced his retirement from the Legislature. We wish him well and thank him for his long-standing support of the college and our law enforcement program.

Michael Seymour is the president of the Alexandria Technical and Community College. In the Know is a rotating column written by community leaders from the Douglas County area.

1972: Burglars boost bulk butter

This Week in 1972 – 50 years ago: The Pioneer-United Telephone Company has announced a construction program of \$432,000 for the Alexandria-Long Prairie district in 1972.

Of this total, \$322,000 is scheduled for the Alexandria part of the district. Major additions include a new cable line from Alexandria to Holmes City. The Holmes City switchboard will be removed in November. Large new cables will also be placed toward Garfield to provide for toll-free service between Garfield and Alexandria, and north along both new and old Highway 29. The rural lines out of Alexandria will be changed to new switchboard equipment so that a rural customer can be moved from one line to another without changing his phone number.

1972, 50 years ago: Authorities are still investigating the theft of 53 boxes of bulk butter from the Garfield Creamery. The burglars worked for their haul as each box weighed nearly 70 pounds. Entrance was gained by breaking the rear door. The burglars started to peel the safe open but gave up and decided to spend their time in loading the butter (valued at \$2,500) unto a waiting truck.

The District 206 Board of Education approved continued support and possible financial contribution to the proposed vocational-secondary education center now being discussed by



RACHEL BARDUSON
Observations from the Archives

three area schools. The center would be a grouping of a number of area schools to provide some vocational courses for students seeking vocational training while still in high school. This would enable some students who do not plan post high school education a chance to gather some skills in certain fields before graduation. Currently Evansville and Villard are studying the program with Alexandria.

1997, 25 years ago: Beginning April 2, 1997, all classified line ads submitted to the Echo Press will automatically, at no extra charge, be shown in a worldwide market via the Quest Network's "AdQuest." Based in Waupaca, Wisconsin, the Quest Network is an online classified service that brings buyers and sellers together on the Internet and through a live operator 800 service. The Echo Press is one of 165 publications in 10 states now on AdQuest with a total daily circulation of those publications of over 10 million.

The Nelson Creamery held its 103rd annual meeting. The financial report showed gross sales of \$13.23 million with a margin before distribution of \$388,000 and 82 million pounds of milk received. The Nelson Creamery has 127 shipping members and

is managed by James A. Kohnen of Alexandria.

2012, 10 years ago: Early in 2012, Bug-a-Boo Bay and Fat Daddy's at Garden Center Lanes pursued — and won — the right to extend their last call from 1 a.m. to 2 a.m. Rapper's and Depot Express soon followed suit. Tourist crowds that emerge from the cabins and come up from the cities this summer will embrace the 2 a.m. close they have been requesting, local bar owners believe.

Just for fun – 1962 – 60 years ago: Debbie Krueger, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Krueger, was pictured beside a blackboard displaying "incendiary," the word that made her the Douglas County Spelling Champion. **Also in 1962:** "Rusty" Rustad, retired implement man, conceived the idea of a farm equipment mechanic course in Minnesota vocational schools. The idea was first adopted by Austin, then in Staples, and now in Alexandria.

Sports Trivia, 1972 – 50 years ago: Gymnastics at Jefferson High School is not a new activity for girls, but 1972 marked the first year of competition with other schools. Renee Mohawk holds a school record by finishing first in the uneven parallel bars in all three meets the team entered. The group is small but with stimulation from competition, Mrs. Bev Lohrman, Jefferson's all-girl coach, hopes to see the program grow.

Rachel Barduson of Alexandria is a regular contributing columnist to the Echo Press Opinion page.