

## Why community newspapers matter

Aimee H. Madden, editor and publisher of The Cedartown Standard and The Rockmart Journal

There's a reason why my mother saved everything from my childhood. Every now and then, between my old collection of Reba McEntire cassette tapes (oh yeah, cassettes!) and handmade friendship bracelets (remember those?) she will unearth a gem of a find.

Just a few days before Christmas, my mom gave me an envelope and card that she had found in my old room. "Here," she said smiling. "You'll love this."

I opened it, and instantly remembered the day I received that card. Inside, it had these words -- typed, of course, on an actual typewriter: Warmest Christmas Wishes. Aimee, a year's subscription to The Cedartown Standard is being sent to you from Paw Paw Ted and Mimaw Texieann. Merry Christmas.

It was a card that was sent to me by someone at the newspaper in 1988 -- I'm guessing the office manager at the time -- informing me of the subscription that had been taken out in my name.

My grandparents had signed me up for a year-long subscription to The Cedartown Standard at the ripe old age of eight. I was ecstatic.

(This comes from a girl who, instead of playing school with her dolls, wrote news articles about them and published her own issues of the Toybox Times.)

The first issue that I received was on Jan, 3, 1989. And no, I am not recalling that from memory (I'm not that big of a newspaper nerd.) I looked it up on the Google Newspaper Database (OK, so maybe I am a news nerd.) The headlines on that day varied from "Walmart plans store near bypass," to "Tax bills in the mail" and "Chamber head's sights on development." Also, the main art on page 1A featured two Cedartown youngsters -- Clark Crawford and Hays Crawford -- playing with a basketball that they had received as a Christmas gift.

A testament from the past that proves there's no better place to find local news than in your community newspaper.

Holding the card in my hands 23 years later makes me wonder if printed newspapers will still exist 23 years from now. But the purpose of this column is not to consult the crystal ball and foretell the survival or demise of print journalism -- the purpose is to tell you why local newspapers are important right now.

There is nothing on the market today selling for 75 cents that can give you as much local information as your community newspaper. A local newspaper can bring a community together like nothing else. I remember a story we ran several years ago about a young, medically challenged child and his family. The story focused on the child's struggles and triumphs with the disease. The backstory told of a

family who was struggling financially with medical bills. After the story ran, calls came in to the office, one after another, asking, "How can we help them?" A concerned reader set up a special account in their name and the family's monetary needs were met.

We've published stories that have driven people to action with positive community results. We've covered stories that have educated people about government waste and environmental issues. A community newspaper is your resource to find out not only the team that won the ballgame, but the names of the high school athletes who helped make it happen.

It is your resource to discover if millage rates are going up or down this year. It's how you find out if school uniforms are being voted in or out this year. It's the way you find what time the parade starts and which roads will be closed and what time the fireworks show will start at the Homespun Festival come July.

Because we live, work and play in the same community as you do, our reporters approach story telling differently than a metro paper or a television station. And I think that's a good thing. Randy Keck, publisher of The Community News in Aledo, Texas, summed it up well when he said: If the mayor gets caught with his hand in the cookie jar, we're certainly going to report it; but even then the coverage will reflect the fact that we may run into him at the grocery store, the baseball game or in church. That reality leads to better reporting, and less sensationalizing.

A community newspaper chronicles the events in your town, in your city, in your neighborhood. We call and ask questions so that you'll have answers. We ask for pictures of your grandbaby's first birthday and your grandparent's 50th wedding anniversary. We write stories about your prize-winning pumpkin and the Main Street fender-bender that made you late for choir practice last Wednesday night.

And we take those stories -- your stories -- and pull our hair out, fight with our computer, drink too much coffee and work way to late into the night in order to print them on a tangible piece of paper and then deliver them right to your house. A community newspaper is the only media outlet that can do that.

A community newspaper matters because the community that it serves matters.

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