

NINA

NORTHERN ILLINOIS NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

EVER THINK ABOUT STARTING YOUR OWN NEWSPAPER? SEE PAGE 3



The smarter the journalists are, the better off society is. To a degree, people read the press to inform themselves – and the better the teacher, the better the student body.



Warren Buffett

ONLINE RESOURCES FOR JOURNALISTS

www.northernstar.info/nina

Vol. 44, No. 4

Route to:

- Publisher
- Managing Ed.
- Newsroom
- Advertising
- Circulation

Your source for ideas, training and insight

By Greg Rivara

“X marks the spot,” the small voice chirps from the backseat. Quinn is 3. Who really knows what the young boy sees – or thinks he sees – as the truck rolls down the road? But the cheerful noise as a new year begins does offer a simple reminder: NINA can be the X for us all. For 44 years, the Northern Illinois Newspaper Association has worked to be a thoughtful and convenient resource for journalists. Through a long-standing affiliation with Northern Illinois University, industry veterans and newspaper educators have worked to provide training, support and networking opportunities for its members.

How close have we been to the mark? With newspapers that include small weekly operations far away from the city’s bright lights to a suburban daily with more than 150,000 subscribers, serving diverse needs can be an invigorating challenge. We all do important work, no matter the size of our staff or budget, and we all need a little help from time to time.

NINA, too, seeks that help as we endeavor to fill your needs. We will continue to offer pragmatic training opportunities that will help create solid reporters, sharp designers and efficient editors. We also recognize that newspapers no longer are the only beast that must be fed as electronic publishing increasingly influences our decisions.

However, NINA is more than a quarterly newsletter that makes the newsroom rounds or a training session that new hires

should attend. Our members also are available to provide timely insight into today’s pressing needs. Have questions about how the print product can enhance your on-line content? Unsure of how to energize a newsroom? Simply want fresh ideas on how to handle that annual holiday story? NINA can help.

Relationships make a local newspaper a valued member of the community. Relationships forged through the Northern Illinois Newspaper Association can help improve your organization. Questions can be posed to other organizations to help identify unforeseen challenges.

What are your needs? Meat-and-potatoes training on reporting, design and writing? Leadership courses for new and veteran staffers? The basics of blogging, vodcasts and Web slide shows? Take stock, and then let us know.

Meanwhile, NINA also plans a mini-review. We will examine our annual contest to see what updates are warranted. We will evaluate how we deliver services. And we will embrace a new relationship with NIU as Dr. Lois Self, our Executive Secretary, eases into retirement.

NINA means many things to many people. That is why we welcome your feedback.

As Quinn would say, “X marks the spot.”



NINA President Greg Rivara is a former managing editor at the Northwest Herald in Crystal Lake and the Kane County Chronicle in Geneva. Contact him at g_rivara@hotmail.com

Reflecting on a year of change

By Colin O'Donnell

2006 proved to be a transitional year for the Northern Illinois Newspaper Association – much like the industry as a whole.

For the first time, we joined with the Illinois Press Association in presenting our spring conference. The topic? That's right: A road map for your paper's Web site. All of us, no matter the size of our publications, need to be thinking about and planning a future that includes a strong online presence. While print is still viable, and I believe will be for a long time, what newspapers do online is becoming more and more a core part of our business, reaching readers we didn't reach before. And, as one of our speakers told us, we can make some money at it as well.

Our fall conference, however, emphasized the power newspapers still have in their communities to make a difference. Be it working with community groups to shine a light on the good they are doing or proactively bringing to the forefront issues like drug use, newspapers – both in print and online – still can bring about change and help find solutions to problems in the towns that we cover.

And we again provided scholarships

to an impressive group of high school journalists that one day may lead the charge into the new future for newspapers and journalism that is already brewing.

At NINA, we said goodbye to some old friends, welcomed one back and brought on several new members who I'm sure will bring new ideas and vitality to our organization. We saw some of our members take on new positions and two even started their own weekly community newspaper. Despite transitioning out of her job as chair of the NIU Department of Communication, Lois Self remained active with us in 2006 as executive secretary and, for that, I am grateful. But we also welcome, in 2007, the addition of Brian Thornton from the NIU journalism faculty.

We're well-positioned for the future and I am proud to have been a part of the process to get NINA where it is today. I look forward to working with Greg Rivara, our 2007 president, to see where it will go in the coming years.



Colin O'Donnell, outgoing NINA president, is vice president / operations and planning for the Daily Herald, Arlington Heights. Contact him at codonnell@dailyherald.com or 847-427-4551.

Stumped on new media? Try these sites

1 COLLEGE MEDIA INNOVATION
www.collegemediainnovation.org

It's a blog aimed at college media, but professional journalists will find it just as useful. The blog, authored by Bryan Murley of Emory & Henry College, is loaded with timely links to relevant how-to sites, trend stories and in-the-know columnists and bloggers.

2 RECOVERING JOURNALIST
<http://recoveringjournalist.typepad.com>

Former Chicago Tribune and Washington Post journalist Mark Potts blogs about the future of journalism. A sample:

"I believe that we are at a significant turning point in media in which the audience and advertisers are massively

switching from print to online. ... The sooner media companies embrace things like user-generated content, new kinds of storytelling, Web 2.0 tools, new forms of advertising and revenue generation, and wide-open interaction with their audience, the sooner they'll halt their slide into oblivion.

"Otherwise, they're toast."

3 ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR
www.rrstar.com

This NINA member's recently revamped site reflects Gannett's new corporate push: Online first, print second. News staffers have been receiving training in video editing and being mobile journalists - "mojos" for short. Their new skills are especially evident in the site's Multimedia section.

BOARD MEMBERS

Greg Rivara, President
g_rivara@hotmail.com

Sharon Boehlefeld, 1st V.P.
The Observer, Rockford Diocese
815-399-4300 / sboehlefeld@rockforddiocese.org

Pete Nenni, 2nd V.P.
Lake County Bureau, Daily Herald
847-680-5510 / pnenni@dailyherald.com

Jim Slonoff, Treasurer
The Hinsdalean
630-323-4422 / jslonoff@thehinsdalean.com

Jim Killam, Communications Coordinator
Northern Star (NIU)
815-753-4239 / jkillam@niu.edu

Colin O'Donnell, Past President
Daily Herald
847-427-4551 / codonnell@dailyherald.com

Brian Thornton, Executive Secretary
NIU Dept. of Communication
815-753-7012 / thornton.b@comcast.net

Josh Albrecht
The Midweek / Valley Free Press, Sycamore
815-895-3100 x239 / jalbrecht@nipublishing.net

Mike Cetera
The Beacon News, Aurora
630-844-5853 / mcetera@scn1.com

Lonny Cain
The Times, Ottawa
815-431-4041 / lonnyc@mywebtimes.com

Joe Corrado
Corrado Communications
847-710-6401 / corrado.com@comcast.net

Jay Dickerson
Galena Gazette
815-777-0019 / editor@galgazette.com

John Etheredge
Ledger-Sentinel, Oswego
630-554-8573 / lsnews@sbcglobal.com

Wally Haas
Rockford Register Star
815-987-1359 / whaas@rockford.gannett.com

Kim Kubiak
The Woodstock Independent
815-338-8040 / gm@inde-news.com

Pamela Lannom
The Hinsdalean
630-323-4422 / plannom@thehinsdalean.com

Rick Nagel
The Beacon News, Aurora
630-844-5840 / rnagel@scn1.com

Denise Renckens
The Daily Journal, Kankakee
815-937-3374 / drenckens@daily-journal.com

Roger Ruthhart
The Rock Island Argus
309-786-6441 / riroger@qconline.com

Randy Swikle
Journalism Education Association
randyswikle@comcast.net

Penny Wiegert
The Observer, Rockford Diocese
815-399-4300 / PWiegert@rockforddiocese.org

Staff and Support

Steve Ralston
Chair, NIU Communication Department
815-753-7028 / sralston@niu.edu

Dana Ditricks-Kunkel
NIU Communication Department secretary
815-753-1564 / dditricks@niu.edu



Seated from left: Lisa Skrapka, business manager; Becky Campbell, senior graphic designer; Polly Rix, associate editor; Dorene Garla, account executive. Standing: co-owners Jim Slonoff, publisher; and Pam Lannom, editor.

Living a journalist's dream

Two NINA members build on decades of experience and start their own paper

By Jim Killam

Last September, a brand-new community newspaper rolled off the press and onto every doorstep in Hinsdale.

The Hinsdalean represents a dream of Jim Slonoff and Pam Lannom, longtime publisher and editor, respectively, of The Doings Newspapers in the same community.

Slonoff and Lannom, also both longtime NINA board members, talked recently about their new venture and offered advice to other journalists thinking of following the same dream.

Are there aspects of Hinsdale that make it an especially good place to try a start-up like this?

Jim Slonoff: Hinsdale, unlike many Chicago suburbs, is still a "small town" with all the good things that represents. Folks here take an enormous amount of the pride in the community. The schools, the neighborhoods and the spirit of community is more than just alive and well here. It is prospering and growing. Of course from the practical standpoint, there are 13

banks, 12 realtors, a strong business district, strong chamber, etc., and demographics that advertisers would kill to capture.

If someone were thinking about starting a community newspaper, what do's and don'ts would you suggest?

Pam Lannom: Know your community. The 18 years I've worked in Hinsdale and the 25 years Jim has worked here have been among our biggest assets in launching the paper.

Know your product. Our paper is unique because it covers just one town, but we also spent a lot of time thinking and talking about how we wanted to cover the town. We incorporated some elements that are common to community newspapers, discarded others and looked to magazines and daily papers for inspiration.

Find good, experienced people to work for you. I can't imagine trying to launch the paper working with people I didn't trust or had to train. Our success so far is due in large part to the quality of our staff.

JS: Make sure you are passionate about community journalism. The

practice is as rewarding as you make it.

What has been the most difficult part of this start-up process?

JS: Well, really nothing. There was a learning curve with our business systems but frankly, the software available today makes it a piece of cake. It really wasn't as difficult as you might believe. We did go through a phase where we couldn't wait to publish -- waiting to get everything together was a pain -- but when we started publishing that pain was quickly forgotten.

PL: I think getting used to the different aspects of running a business has been the most difficult thing for me. Dealing with payroll and finances at this level is a new experience. That said, I have been pleasantly surprised with how easy everything has been.

What part did you think would be difficult, but it turned out to be much easier than expected?

PL: I thought it would take more time for readers to develop a real relationship with The Hinsdalean, but the comments we heard from people early on indicated they thought of

'Yes you can – it's your newspaper'

☞ FROM PAGE 3

the paper as their own pretty much right away. Hearing that was really wonderful.

JS: Having an office located in the heart of downtown was something we said would be important and a must — but probably wouldn't be able to have. Sure enough, late in August a friend told of his plans to lease more space. BAM -- sure enough, his office was and is perfect for us. Pam wanted to be in the central business district and I wanted wood floors. We got both.

What aspects of the new paper have readers responded to most positively?

PL: People talk a lot about the tone. I find this fascinating, as I don't think my writing or Polly (Rix)'s writing has changed since we left The Doings. I think the paper has a different feel to it -- more of a hometown or small-town feel and I think readers like that and feel comfortable with it.

People also like the size (our biggest paper so far has been 44 pages, our smallest was 28). They can get through the paper cover to cover and they like being able to read the whole thing.

People also say they like not having to read stories about people and issues in other towns.

JS: We have opted for free distribution to every home in Hinsdale. Of course this was a business decision giving our advertisers 100 percent penetration. People call us and want to pay for it! Some of their concerns are they want to make sure we are successful. That is something else. The acceptance was something we dreamed might happen in time; it seems to have

happened from the start.

How does online media figure into your equation, and why?

PL: We have a Web site with a link to a site with published and unpublished photos that people can view and purchase. The rest of the site is under construction. We'd like to use it for utilitarian purposes (posting obituaries or submitting wedding announcements, for example) and as a complement for the print product. I think the first objective will be accomplished soon. The second will take a bit more time and effort.

JS: We'll get there. Right now were just old-fashioned newspapermen and use ink and paper. We are planning a site. However, it was something we consciously decided to do last.

You've gotta know that you're living many journalists' fantasy. Would you say that fantasy is realistic?

JS: Absolutely! That being said, we are only on week 15. But we're meeting all of our revenue goals and practicing journalism the way we want to.

Early on, Pam was working on a "week in the life of the football team" story here in town. As she attended practices, meetings, games, interviewed players, coaches, etc she gathered a lot of information. A real lot of information. As she went about writing she would stop herself occasionally and say, "How can we run this story? It's now 50 inches." I'd say, "You'd better have room for my photos." She would say, "We can't run something that's going to run this long."

I turned to her and said, "Yes you can. It's your newspaper.

You can have as many pages as you want."

She smiled and went back to work. We ended up running three pages and the story was wonderful. The response was as well.

PL: I have a hard time answering that question. On the one hand, this project has gone so well that my husband calls it "the perfect storm." Things seemed to line up in our favor once we committed to the project. And I can't say enough about what a joy it has been to get back to my roots: interviewing people and sharing their stories with readers. Work doesn't feel like work most days, as I'm having too much fun.

On the other hand, it is work, and I don't think it's for everyone. Jim and I both are doing a lot more than just sitting back and giving directions to the staff. I write and edit half of the copy; he lays out all the news pages, takes almost all of our photos, handles billing and invoicing and works with advertisers. If we had to hire two more people to do our jobs, we'd be struggling financially. But for people who know and love community journalism and have a location where they think such a paper can work, I think it is completely realistic.

One of my friends once asked me what we eventually hope to accomplish if we have no plans of expanding (which we don't). I said, humbly, that I'd like to revolutionize the newspaper industry. I think it would be great if more newspaper men and women would start independent publications that return to the roots of community journalism. Our motto is "One town. One paper." It would be great if more towns had newspapers that follow the same philosophy.

CALENDAR

Friday, Jan. 19
NINA Board meeting.
10 a.m., Northern Star,
NIU-DeKalb.

Friday, Feb. 16
Illinois College Press
Association job fair
and convention. 9
a.m., Holiday Inn City
Centre, Chicago.
To participate as an
interviewer, contact Jim
Killam, 815-753-4239
or jkillam@niu.edu.

Saturday, March 3
Northern Star Hall of
Fame dinner, DeKalb.
For details, see www.
northernstar.info/
alumni or contact Jim
Killam.

Friday, March 23
NINA Board meeting.
10 a.m., Northern Star,
NIU-DeKalb.

Friday, April 27
NINA Spring Confer-
ence. Details TBA.

Friday, June 22
NINA Board meeting.
10 a.m., Northern Star,
NIU-DeKalb.

Friday, Sept. 7
(If needed.) NINA
Board meeting. 10
a.m., Northern Star,
NIU-DeKalb.

Thursday, Oct. 25
NINA Board dinner.
Time and place to be
announced.

Friday, Oct. 26
NINA Fall Conference
and Awards Luncheon,
NIU-DeKalb.

Friday, Dec. 7
NINA Board meeting.
10 a.m. Northern Star,
NIU-DeKalb.