15TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

CommonWealth

POLITICS, IDEAS & CIVIC LIFE IN MASSACHUSETTS

What happens when a community loses its newspaper?

Holyoke lost the *Transcript-Telegram* nearly 20 years ago.

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John F. Kennedy

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DEPARTMENTS

DISCUSSION

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK MORELLI

15 years and counting

In 1996, the first issue of *CommonWealth* magazine featured a cover story on the changing economics of middle-class life in Massachusetts. The story focused on Heritage Road in Billerica, where the residents were doing reasonably well but having some doubts about the promise of the American Dream.

Fifteen years later, *CommonWealth* is operating in a very different journalistic environment but still pursuing answers to many of the same questions. We are releasing two issues of the magazine simultaneously. One is focused on the American Dream, while this magazine, our 15th anniversary issue, surveys the state of journalism in Massachusetts.

It's an interesting time to take stock of what's happening in journalism. The business has taken a tough economic punch and is still trying to figure out how to survive in a digital age. Newsrooms are filled with far fewer reporters today than just a decade ago and there's been an exodus of journalists from Washington, Beacon Hill, and city halls across the state.

Walter Robinson, a former *Boston Globe* reporter and currently a professor of journalism at Northeastern University, says news organizations are having a hard time playing their watchdog role, leaving unchallenged much of what government officials say. "Increasingly, for the public, government is what it says it is," he says.

But amid the gloom and doom there are glimmers of hope. *The Boston Globe's* recent launch of BostonGlobe.com is a bid to see if people will pay for quality news online. A lot is riding on its success.

We're seeing more collaboration between news organizations and more reliance on nonconventional sources of reporting. Boston University, for example, through classes that put journalism students to work for regional newspapers, now boasts that it has more reporters covering the State House than any news organization.

In this issue, we take a look at some of the challenges —and opportunities—created by the seismic changes in the journalism world. Tom Fiedler, dean of the Boston University College of Communication, tries in our cover story to answer a nagging question: What happens when a community loses its daily newspaper, as Holyoke did nearly 20 years ago?

Gabrielle Gurley looks at the rise of nonprofit journalism and what it means for the industry. In his Perspective, Eric Newton of the Knight Foundation recounts a number of nonprofit successes and sounds an optimistic tone. "With our new tools today, an individual journalist can do more now than ever," he says. "Our profession is limited only by our own imagination—and our courage."

CommonWealth is a bit of an anomaly in this discussion. As founder Tripp Jones recounts in our Conversation,

The magazine has evolved, but its mission of examining politics and public policy remains the same

CommonWealth was established as a journalistic arm of MassINC, a nonpartisan think tank. It was supposed to shine a spotlight on public policy issues that were getting short shrift in the mainstream press. But as the mainstream press has retrenched, *CommonWealth* has become more of a traditional news organization.

I'd like to thank the sponsors of this magazine and the Serious Fun event for making *CommonWealth's* journalism possible. Serious Fun is meant to be fun and light-hearted, but its purpose is to generate money for serious journalism and to award scholarships to the young people who may become the news gurus of the future. Thanks to all our supporters.

Bruce Mohl

BRUCE MOHL

Family photos are a great way to mark the passing of time. Take a look at the cover above of *CommonWealth*'s first magazine 15 years ago. It features the Timmins family of Billerica. They lived on a typical street in a typical town. The Dennis the Menace lookalike on the cover was 6-year-old Ben Timmins. The Timmins family later moved to Pennsyl - vania, but Ben returned to Boston to study journalism at Boston University. Fittingly, he interned during the summer of 2010 at *CommonWealth*, where we were lucky enough to snap another picture of his family. Ben now works at *Automobile Magazine* in Detroit.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BEN TIMMINS

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All proceeds from Serious Fun, MassINC and *CommonWealth* magazine's 15th anniversary fundraiser, go to The *CommonWealth* Campaign for Civic Journalism, which funds the ongoing operation of *CommonWealth* magazine and a scholarship program for public affairs journalism students.

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Holyoke City Hall, looking up Dwight Street.

What happens when a community loses its newspaper?

In Holyoke, residents still mourn the loss of the T-T nearly 20 years later

BY TOM FIEDLER | PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK MORELLI

For days, hundreds of callers speaking in the hushed tones more commonly reserved for funeral parlors queried switchboard operators inside the *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram*: "Are you open, are you still publishing?" the callers would ask. The mood in the once-proud newspaper was as grim as the January weather. It was an open secret that the "T-T," as the paper was called, had

An old mill building on Holyoke's Open Square Way

struggled for months, even years, to survive in a tough western Massachusetts economy.

Advertising revenues had cratered as local businesses cut back or fled the decaying manufacturing city. Circulation also was falling and expenses were up, completing a hellish trifecta. Many employees, sensing the worst, began taking home the photos of children and pets, packing up their personal papers, sharpening their resumes, checking the help-wanted sections of other community newspapers, and quietly emptying their desks. "But I kept my box of Kleenex," receptionist Ann Baird admitted to a reporter. "I knew we'd be needing that when the crying began."

Precisely at 10 a.m., on January 21, 1993, Donald R. Dwight, whose family's ties to the newspaper went back more than 50 years, strode into the newsroom with other senior executives and summoned everyone to gather close. He looked stricken as he delivered the news to the assembled staff, people he regarded more as family than employees. His message: After 110 years as Holyoke's only daily newspaper — "Your Hometown Newspaper," declared the words beneath the paper's masthead — the end had come.

"Things change," Dwight would write in a front-page column in that afternoon's final edition. "A city changes. And now this newspaper changes. Change is not always either good or bad, but all change contains loss within it."

Dwight outlined a plan to convert the newspaper with roots predating the Civil War to a weekly, which would save a few jobs. He even called it a "return to its founding tradition," a reference to its birth as a weekly cranked out on a hand press in 1849. Clinging to that hope, publisher Murray D. Schwartz told the staff, "This isn't the traditional story of the death of a newspaper."

But he was wrong. Three months later the owners shuttered the weekly and, as far as local journalism was concerned, the dusk turned to dark. The nearly 40,000 readers who just a few weeks before had been served by the paper were left with nothing that could be considered comparable. The *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram* was dead.

Nearly two decades have passed since that day. In Holyoke babies have been born, raised and sent off to college or war or other adult responsibilities without ever seeing their names in a T-T article taped to a refrigerator. Thousands of local deaths weren't recorded in obituary pages. Congressmen, mayors, and city councilors have been elected, served, and retired without knowing a hometown daily's beat reporter. In short, all the fundamentals of civic life have continued as before, but, like ghosts, they've left no trace of their passage.

Holyoke's population peaked at 60,000; today it's half that.

HOLYOKE NOT ALONE

Holyoke is not alone in facing life without a daily journalistic record. In New England alone, 13 daily papers have closed or gone to weekly publication. Most of those have been in Massachusetts, where six dailies have converted to weekly publication—the *Clinton Item*, *Dedham Daily Transcript*, *Haverhill Gazette*, *Marlboro Enterprise, Hudson Sun*, *Melrose News,* and *Waltham News-Tribune*—and three—the *Beverly Times*, the *Peabody Times* and the *Transcript-Telegram*—have closed.

All but one of the surviving daily newspapers in New England have seen dramatic drops in circulation, some as high as 70 percent. (The exception is the *St. Albans Messenger* in Vermont). They're part of a national story about the decline of local newsrooms. The Federal Communications Commission's recent report entitled "The Information Needs of Communities" estimated that newsrooms have eliminated 13,400 jobs in the past four years, reducing reporting ranks to about the same level as in 1970. A similarly dire study by Rick Edmonds of the Poynter Institute, an independent journalism research center, concluded that annual spending on news gathering also plunged by $1.6 billion. In a sentence, communities across the nation are being covered by fewer reporters armed with fewer resources.

And yet, does it matter?

A March 2009 survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press asked two related questions. The first: "If your local newspaper closed, how much would it hurt civic life?" The second: "How much would you miss it?" The response to the questions, according to the Pew press release, was akin to a collective "shrug." Barely four out of 10 respondents said that missing the newspaper would hurt the community's civic life, and just three of 10 said that they would personally miss reading the paper.

That's a long way from attitudes 50 years ago when newspapers seemed tightly stitched into the fabric of American life. In the summer of 1945, the newspaper deliverers for New York City's eight major dailies—you read that number correctly, eight major dailies—suddenly went on strike. For a populace familiar with the constant cries of newsboys yelling "Extra! Extra!" and to gorging on a daily feast of all the news they could digest and more, this was a stunning event. For 17 days, with the exception of radio news (which then, as now, depended on the newspapers for content), New Yorkers went cold turkey. Renowned sociologist Bernard Berelson seized the moment to explore what then was a new question: "What 'missing

the newspaper' means."

Hardly a collective shrug, many New Yorkers fell into a serious funk. Among the comments captured by Berelson: "I am lost and nervous. I'm ashamed to admit it." Or, "It's like being in jail not to have a paper." And, "We're at a loss without our paper." Some said they felt that without knowledge of the news they had nothing to talk about with colleagues and friends. Others missed columnists, the comics, the gossip, the status of carrying a particular paper tucked under their arms, or simply the pleasure of reading.

When a similar strike hit the city in late 1958, students and faculty at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia repeated Berelson's survey to see if attitudes had changed, especially with the advent of television, which some thought might lessen the loss. That wasn't the case. Nearly 9 of 10 New Yorkers told researchers that they missed their papers; two-thirds of those said they missed them dearly. "Being without papers is like being without shoes," one said. "I'm utterly lost," said another. Men said they missed being informed about local and world events. Women said they felt they were going shopping "blind."

Only a few found a silver lining in the time they didn't spend while reading: "I'm getting a lot of work done," one said. "No more excuses not to get down to work."

Granted, there's an apples-to-oranges criticism to be made between a city that was denied newspapers for a few weeks, and one like Holyoke that lost its only daily entirely. A more apt opportunity to study the question of what happens to a community that loses its primary news source came more recently in Cincinnati when the *Cincinnati Post* ceased publication, although more with a whimper than a bang. The *Post's* owner, E.W. Scripps Co., had announced years before that it intended to close the afternoon paper in December 2007 at the end of a joint-publishing agreement with its much stronger competitor, the *Cincinnati Enquirer*.

Although the *Enquirer,* with a circulation of 210,000 at the time, was many times bigger than the *Post,* with a circulation of just 27,000, the papers over the years had carved out distinct geographic audiences with little overlap. The *Enquirer* concentrated on the city and its nearby western and northern suburbs. The *Post,* by contrast, was the dominant paper and news source across the Ohio River in the northern Kentucky suburbs and towns. This separation enabled a pair of economists from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs to study the impact of the *Post's* closure much as they might have studied a city like Holyoke that depended on a single newspaper.

What they found had implications beyond just a few ex-readers in a funk. Indeed, the communities themselves seemed to fall into one, at least as measured by several

indicators of civic health. In the 12 months encompassed by the study, which included the 2008 election cycle, the authors found that fewer people offered themselves for local offices, fewer incumbents faced challenges, and voter turnout fell. The authors rightly cautioned that the study's inherent limitations—a relatively short time span

A study in Cincinnati found the loss of a newspaper sent the communities it served into a funk

and the continued existence of another paper in the region, although not in those particular suburbs—made it more anecdotal than conclusive. Nonetheless, they cited the work of another scholar who argued that the newspaper industry's decline "raises practical questions for anyone concerned about the future of American democracy."

Practical questions, such as who, if not journalists, will hold politicians and governments to account? Who will inform citizens of problems in the community that might not be in plain sight? Who will train a spotlight on corrupt or incompetent public employees and office holders? Steven Waldman, who wrote the FCC's report on the information needs of local communities, stated the obvious in a speech at Harvard in September, saying that the absence or weakening of a local press enables those who are already in the power structure to essentially make their own news. "The result has been a shift in producing news away from journalists and toward government and institutions." In short, those in the power structure can tell citizens what they want to tell them, in the way they want to tell them—that's, of course, if they tell them anything at all.

Says Boston University journalism professor Christopher Daly: "You have to ask yourself what happens to the coverage of City Hall in places that have suffered a real cutback in reporting troops like Holyoke." And the effects don't stop at City Hall. "I would also assume," adds Daly, "that this is some kind of golden era to be a chief of police," with no cops reporters watching over your shoulder.

BOOM TO BUST

The *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram's* troubles were clearly connected to the city itself. And what happened to Holyoke is the now too-familiar story of hundreds of other communities in the northern industrial states that traced an arc from birth to boom to bust, or nearly so, and now are struggling to come back in some reinvented way.

Holyoke owed its rise to its location along the Connecticut River, which cut through the Pioneer Valley and tumbled over Hadley Falls, the steepest drop on the river and the ideal location for a dam generating hydropower. That natural asset lured the early investors in New England's textile and paper industries who, in the mid-19th century, envisioned and built what local historians claim was one of the first planned manufacturing cities in the nation.

The developers laid the city out in a grid with its sections fed by man-made canals powering dozens of mills lining the banks. Well into the 20th century, Holyoke's paper mills were the most productive in the country, if not the world, giving rise to its nickname as The Paper City. Successive waves of immigrants—Irish, French-Canadian and, more recently, Puerto Rican—worked in those mills. The city lays claim to being the birthplace of volleyball and boasts among its museums the Volleyball Hall of Fame.

But in the 1930s, as alternative energy sources were developed and manufacturers sought cheaper locales for newer factories, Holyoke's population peaked at about 60,000 and hovered there for the next three decades. Today it is barely half that. And the composition of that population also changed dramatically. The city that once claimed the nation's largest St. Patrick's Day parade is now 40 percent Hispanic. In a cruel twist of fate, the wave of Puerto Ricans hit the city just as the mills were closing and jobs disappearing. The urban woes often associated with unemployment enveloped Holyoke, scarring both the city and the psyches of many of its residents.

"People began to look at Holyoke as a scary place," says local historian and businessman Craig Della Penna. "In the 1970s, Holyoke was the fire capital of the world; all kinds of fires, arsons, spontaneous combustion. Holyoke looked like Dresden in 1945."

Most of the mills either burned, were bull-dozed, or both. Graduates of Holyoke High typically left the city, never to return. By 1993, with businesses fleeing the city (some for the Holyoke Mall on the outskirts), the population shrinking and becoming less likely to read English, the economic headwinds were too much for the newspaper. On its final day, the staff that once included about 100 had been steadily cut to 69.

In the wake of the *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram's* demise, two free weekly tabloids have emerged, the *Holyoke Sun*

and *Hello Holyoke*. But neither has shown either the ability or ambition to practice accountability journalism. The nearby Springfield *Republican* opened a nine-person bureau in Holyoke in the mid-1990s in a bid to fill some of the void. But that bureau closed in 2009 and coverage of Holyoke today is left to the *Republican's* roving regional reporter, who can rarely make scheduled meetings, much less dig for enterprise.

Lifelong Holyoke resident James Sutter, who owns a local jewelry store, says the newspaper's death "left an enormous void in Holyoke. The T-T wasn't *The New York Times*. But it had the time and people to do some real investigating."

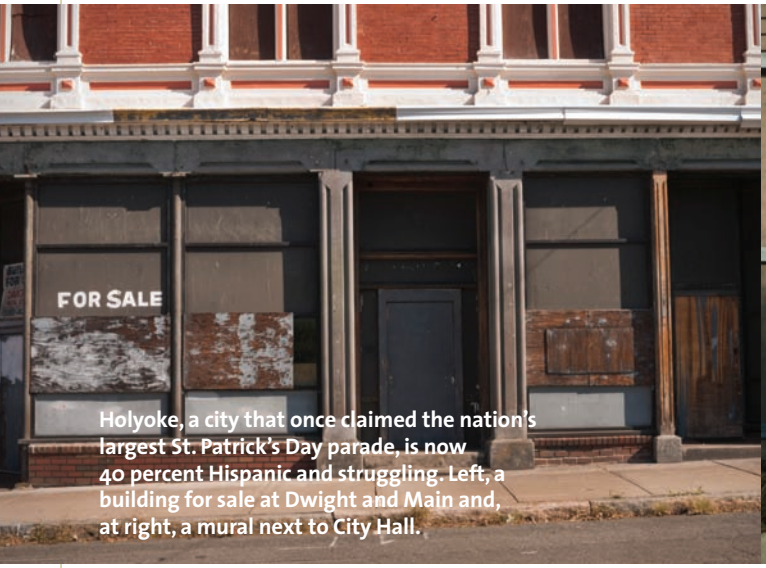
As in the Kentucky suburbs studied in the wake of the *Cincinnati Post's* demise, the Holyoke residents I interviewed uniformly lamented the absence of civic energy. "Not having a newspaper lowers the caliber of political discourse," says Sutter, the jeweler. "There isn't a place for serious discussion, for candidates' platforms to be developed and debated. Elections here are like running for senior class president: they are all 'he-said, she-said'."

Della Penna also says the city misses a less obvious role filled by the T-T: that of educator and critic. To the very end the newspaper was a progressive voice for renovating the riverfront and saving the city's many historic structures, he says. Indeed, in 1988 the T-T was named New England's best newspaper by the New England Newspaper Publishers Association.

Today, continues Della Penna, "The people who are running this city don't do a good job—and not because they don't want to, but they don't know any better. There's no local newspaper to show them how other communities do it better."

In many communities where newspapers have declined or died, alternative news sources have emerged on the Web. In some places, such as Seattle, Denver, and Ann Arbor, Michigan, these news sites are staffed by veteran journalists from the deceased newspapers who have been relatively successful in filling the void.

That's not the case in Holyoke, at least not yet. Community organizer Mary Serreze launched a site based in the neighboring city of Northampton called northamptonmedia.com. She and her editor, David Reid, are attempting to spark a revival of accountability journalism on the Web that has been lost in traditional media. The site has enjoyed some success, primarily by focusing on one story of public interest at a time and reporting on it intensely. But she and Reid admit that their efforts, as well as those



Holyoke, a city that once claimed the nation's largest St. Patrick's Day parade, is now 40 percent Hispanic and struggling. Left, a building for sale at Dwight and Main and, at right, a mural next to City Hall.

of the free weeklies and the Springfield *Republican,* fall short of replacing what has been lost in Holyoke.

That city, she says, "is fascinating and story-rich, but there's not sufficient coverage and there's nobody doing real news with our standards of objectivity and accountability."

Reid, who was on the Holyoke beat years ago with the *Republican* before it cut back, says the reality is that only rarely these days does any reporter attend a Holyoke government meeting. "And when no reporters go to these meetings, or on a daily basis ask questions of city officials, government can operate in the dark. The citizens are not informed and they don't know how to make decisions."

Again, that repeats the story in other communities facing similar circumstances. The FCC's report found that, in contrast to the more than 13,000 jobs lost by the traditional media's down-sizing over the last decade, online nonprofit sites have hired relatively few back. Twelve of the most influential nonprofit news websites disclosed at a gathering that they employed 88 full-time staffers. Where news organizations have cut $1.6 billion in annual spending, new online operations have added $180 million—trading dollars for dimes—according to the report.

Still, the Holyoke story is not without the possibility of a happy ending for both journalism and the citizens. Holyoke can boast some impressive assets, led by its hydroelectric system. That asset attracted the High Performance Computing Center to Holyoke, which is run by a consortium of high-technology companies—Cisco, EMC. and Accenture PLC—and universities—Harvard, MIT, UMass, and Boston University. Its location near the intersection of Interstates 91 and 90 makes it a hub for ground transportation. And the nearby Mount Tom Range is a magnet for outdoor recreation.

The prospect of leveraging this into a bright future may lie with a fast-growing citizens' group gathering under the acronym CRUSH—Citizens for the Revitalization and Urban Success of Holyoke. The group's ambitious mission is to "maximize Holyoke's potential to reclaim its historic infrastructure and its reputation as an innovative, diverse, culturally vibrant and sustainable city." Its virtual meeting place is an energetic website, www.crushonholyoke.org.

In its relatively brief lifespan, CRUSH has enlisted 885 dues-paying members and has emerged as something of a hybrid of political party, social network, and information conduit. Members can take tango lessons, attend film festivals, contribute to covered-dish suppers, and—perhaps most importantly—demand that aspiring office holders explain their views on a variety of issues. In the most recent mayoral election, CRUSH hosted a critical candidates' debate just days before the primary and posted video and blogs on the website.

Adding to the group's potential is its membership of mostly young, Web-savvy professionals fluent in the Web's social media. Under discussion among the leaders is whether CRUSH should more formally adopt some of the functions of a journalistic enterprise, such as doing original reporting rather than relying on the occasional blog posting by a member who may have a particular bias. Sutter points out that an advantage of being a Web-based organization is that "there is ample opportunity for citizens to join the discussion."

If the site becomes attractive enough to local businesses to draw advertising, Sutter says he could envision it supporting a professional reporting staff.

Still, the cloud left by the *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram's* demise remains. Even the most optimistic of the city's young activists aren't yet able to predict that a replacement will be found for it.

"I think Holyoke could do great things," Sutter says. "I'd love to be here to ride that wave. But if it doesn't start happening soon," he says, his voice trailing off, "I don't know." CW

Tom Fiedler is the dean of the Boston University College of Communication.

Index of Consumer Sentiment

"The Massachusetts Index of Consumer Sentiment hit a new low for the year as residents' views of the economy continued to sour."

—MPG Trend Monitor, July 2011

73	68	59	?
January 2011	April 2011	July 2011	October 2011

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The main press room at the State House is largely vacant.

Silent crisis

The shrinking press corps at places such as the State House leads to a decline in what the FCC calls 'accountability reporting'

BY BRUCE MOHL AND MARIAH SONDERGARD | PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK MORELLI

GOV. DEVAL PATRICK issued a press release in September announcing seven new appointees to the University of Massachusetts Board of Trustees. The release contained all the basics: their names, their previous work histories, and a canned statement from the governor saying, "These board members all care deeply about the University of Massachusetts and will work to strengthen our already robust system of state colleges and universities."

Most news outlets ignored the announcement. A few essentially published the press release, highlighting a local person who had been named to the board. Others ran an Associated Press version of the story, which regurgitated the basics while noting that several of the appointees were Democratic loyalists and two had donated money to the governor's campaign.

Two news outlets, *The Boston Globe* and Northampton's *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, dug deeper and provided more context, in the

process transforming a government press release into a broader story about Patrick's second-term proclivity for exerting control over state government and rewarding political allies.

Both the *Globe's* Frank Phillips and the *Gazette's* Chad Cain focused on Patrick's reappointment of board chairman James Karam, a Fall River businessman who led the recent search for new university president Robert Caret. Both reporters pointed out that Attorney General Martha Coakley had recently ruled that the search for Caret had been conducted illegally behind closed doors.

Phillips reported that members of the Karam family had donated close to $38,000 to Patrick since 2006 and that Karam and his brother had hosted a New Bedford fundraiser for the governor in August that raised more than $35,000. Cain quoted Max Page, a professor of architecture and history at UMass Amherst, as saying Karam's appointment was a "black eye" for the university. "This is the worst kind of signal to send, that a law-breaker can be reappointed to the board of trustees," Page said.

The stories represent the type of reporting that is becoming more and more scarce as newsrooms across the state empty out. The Federal Communications Commission, in a report issued this summer, called these types of stories "local, professional, accountability reporting." The agency says the media landscape is more diverse than ever, but warned that the independent watchdog

FCC: The watchdog function envisioned for journalism by the founding fathers is at risk at the local level.

function that the founding fathers envisioned for journalism is in some cases at risk at the local level as fewer and fewer reporters scramble from one story to the next, juggling more duties than ever.

"They can describe the landscape, but they have less time to turn over rocks," the report says. "They can convey what they see before their eyes—often better and faster than ever—but they have less time to cover the stories lurking in the shadows or to unearth the information that powerful institutions want to conceal."

Steven Waldman, a former *Newsweek* and *US News & World Report* reporter and the lead author of the FCC report, says the news industry is going through a revolution in style and substance that is far from over. He says retrenchment is dramatically affecting the quality of news coverage at the state and local level, leaving the political system vulnerable to abuse. What frightens him most is that almost no one realizes there is a problem. "It's a little bit of a silent crisis because you don't know what you're missing," he says.

QUIET AT THE STATE HOUSE

Peter Lucas has been in and out of the State House as a reporter many times over the last 50 years, and now he's back—in the same desk he sat at in 1963 when he worked for the now-closed *Boston Traveler*. He says the big difference this time, working as a columnist for the *Lowell Sun*, is that it's so quiet.

The cavernous fourth-floor press room he occupies, with newspapers piled high on desks and bumper stickers of old campaigns plastered against a wall, used to be a beehive of activity. Ten years ago, every desk was occupied and the noisy chatter of reporters filled the room. Now there's only Lucas and one or two other reporters from the Associated Press. The rest of the desks, aside from the occasional day visitor, go unused, gathering dust.

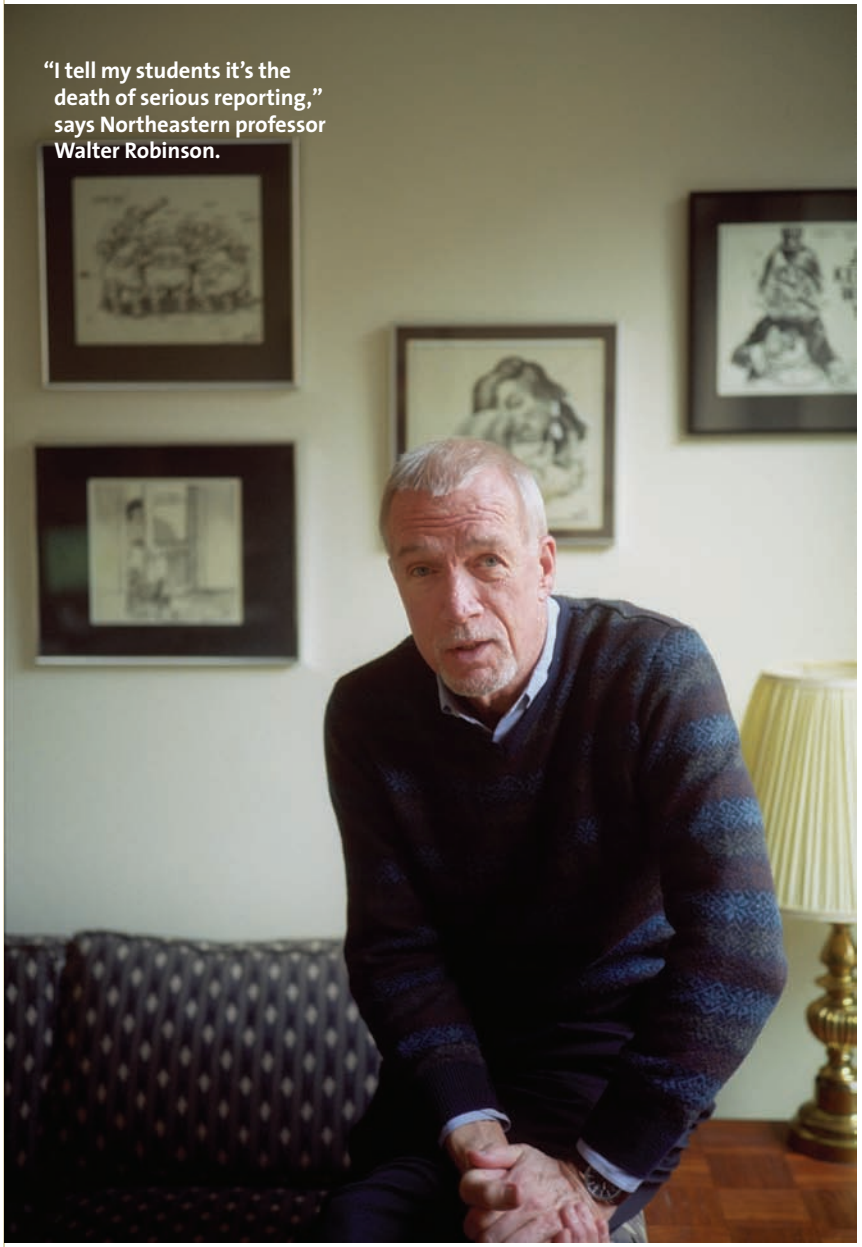
"Before, these phones would be ringing constantly," Lucas says. "Now, the phones never ring."

Loads of reporters and TV cameras show up for major news events at the State House, but most of them return to their home offices when the event is over. About 15 to 17 reporters work at the State House on a regular basis. They occupy six rooms. Reporters from Lowell, Worcester, and Springfield share one room, a handful of radio reporters are in another, and Lucas and the AP share the main room. The State House News Service, the *Globe*, and the *Boston Herald* all have their own offices.

Walter Robinson, a former State House bureau chief for the *Globe* and now a professor of journalism at Northeastern University, says 55 full-time accredited reporters worked at the State House in the late 1970s. He says the *Globe* had six, the *Herald* five, and the state's regional papers would send at least one and sometimes two or three. There were two wire services in addition to the State House News Service and each television station sent two reporters. "Everybody staffed it full-time," Robinson says.

But over the intervening years, and particularly in the last 10 years, the news media have scaled way back at the State House. The *Globe* is down to three reporters. The *Herald* has one who is intermittently there. AP rotates one or two people in and out. TV stations come and go, but no one is assigned there regularly anymore. All but three of the state's regional newspapers have pulled back. The *Patriot Ledger*, owned by GateHouse Media, pulled its reporter earlier this year; years ago the newspaper had three at the State House.

"Before, these phones would be ringing constantly. Now the phones never ring," says Peter Lucas, a columnist for the *Lowell Sun*.



"I tell my students it's the death of serious reporting," says Northeastern professor Walter Robinson.

Jim Campanini, the editor of the *Lowell Sun*, said he had three reporters covering the State House when he first took over nine years ago. He's now down to one reporter plus Lucas, whom he lured out of retirement. He says he's committed to maintaining a presence at the State House because readers want to know what their lawmakers are doing. "As long as I'm the editor here and Mark O'Neil is the publisher, we will fulfill our responsibility to cover the State House," he says. "We have had to retrench, but we haven't had to retreat."

Richard Lodge, editor of the *MetroWest Daily News* in Framingham and editor-in-chief of the GateHouse Media west unit, was forced to retreat. When his State House reporter left for another job several years ago, he tried to rotate reporters in and out for awhile but eventually had to eliminate the position. "The franchise here is local news," he says.

For major State House stories, Lodge now uses the AP wire service or the State House News Service. For coverage of local lawmakers or issues of particular importance to his readers, he relies on a student writer from the Boston University State House program. BU professor Fred Bayles, a former AP reporter himself, oversees the students and edits their copy, but they report directly to a newspaper editor, who also supervises them.

Bayles says his students, who write for the *Cape Cod Times*, the *Lowell Sun*, the *Patriot Ledger*, the *Salem News*, and the Fitchburg-based *Sentinel and Enterprise*, make up the largest news operation at the State House, generating 200 to 250 byline pieces a semester. It's a blend of academic and real-life work that gives students valuable experience and the newspapers some cheap reporting help. The newspapers pay $250 per semester for the service.

The State House News Service is one news operation that has benefited from news cutbacks. It used to be a backstop for most news organizations, essentially a transcription service keeping track of hearings, press conferences, and legislative sessions. But as the reporting ranks dwindled on Beacon Hill, the News Service has become a major supplier of State House stories to newspapers and media outlets across the state.

Michael Norton, editor of the News Service, says the exodus of reporters from Beacon Hill has been good for his business, but he's still troubled by it. He worries about what's not being covered, since more and more key decisions on Beacon Hill are made behind closed doors and getting at stories is harder than ever. "I wish there were more people up here covering things," he says.

As for the BU student journalists fanning out across Beacon Hill, Norton says they play a useful role. "But having someone cover something for a few months is not the same as having an experienced reporter covering the State House as a beat," he says.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KATHLEEN DOOHER

CIRCULATION DROPS AT THE STATE'S 10 BIGGEST NEWSPAPERS

	DAILY 2000	DAILY 2011	% DECLINE	SUNDAY 2000	SUNDAY 2011	% DECLINE
Boston Globe	469,878	219,214	53	726,830	356,652	51
Boston Herald	261,017	123,811	53	168,352	87,296	48
Telegram & Gazette (Worcester)	104,054	82,761	21	127,737	87,702	31
Republican (Springfield)	92,496	60,165	35	139,293	95,847	31
Patriot Ledger (Quincy)	68,367	41,135	40	83,728	63,000	25
Eagle-Tribune (Lawrence)	55,694	38,222	31	60,939	39,615	35
Lowell Sun	51,936	44,225	15	55,390	49,559	11
Cape Cod Times	50,106	37,522	25	60,832	41,901	31
Enterprise (Brockton)	41,197	24,380	41	49,995	26,086	48
Standard-Times (New Bedford)	37,151	23,817	36	41,249	25,526	38

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulation

Lodge agrees. He says if he still had a reporter at the State House, he or she would be doing stories of local interest as well as filing public records requests to ferret out payrolls and contracts. "There are just fewer reporters covering state government," he says. "There's enterprise and investigative stuff that's not getting done."

Lucas says he thinks there is a link between the diminishing State House press corps and the lack of legislative debate on issues on Beacon Hill. "Before there would be debate and it would be covered," he says. "Now everything is done in caucus."

Lucas sees a link between the diminishing press corps and the lack of debate on Beacon Hill.

He also worries about the press's diminished watchdog role. "It's not totally lost," he says. "The *Globe's* Spotlight Team will still do a piece. The *Globe* can still do it. It has the manpower and the experienced staff. Otherwise, there's not a lot of memory up here."

Robinson says the operations of government—the hearings, the agencies, the nuts and bolts of political life—aren't really covered anymore. Much of what government does or says goes unchallenged. "I tell my students it's the death of serious reporting," he says. "Increasingly, for the public, government is what it says it is."

THE BIG SHRINK

During one week in September 2000, the *Globe* put out a Sunday edition that ran 334 pages long, not including the comics, the magazine, or the advertising inserts. The *Herald* countered with a 183-page tabloid edition. The state's two flagship newspapers were big the rest of the week as well. The *Globe* averaged 106 pages a day Monday through Saturday, while the *Herald* averaged 115 pages.

Today, both newspapers are shadows of their former selves. They are smaller, contain less news, and yet are more expensive. Using the same week in September 2011 for comparison purposes, the *Globe's* Sunday edition is a third of the size it was 11 years ago but costs 75 percent more on the newsstand. The *Herald's* Sunday edition is less than half the size it was in 2000 and costs 15 percent more. Daily editions of both papers are about half the size and cost twice as much. (Disclosure: Bruce Mohl used to work for the *Globe*.)

The smaller size of the newspapers is a reflection of what many in the industry call the digital disruption. Most Massachusetts newspapers don't break out their financials, but the New York Times Co., which owns the *Globe* and the *Worcester Telegram*, lumps them together on its balance sheet. The two papers reported combined revenue of $189 million during the second quarter of 2000, with 78 percent coming from advertising, 20 percent from circulation, and 2 percent from other sources. During the second quarter of this year, revenue was down 46 percent to $102 million, with advertising accounting for 51 percent of the total and circulation 39 percent. In essence, circulation revenue has held steady despite a 53 percent drop-off in readers at the *Globe* and a 21 percent decline at the *Telegram*. For the state's 10 biggest newspapers as a whole, cir-

culation was off 44 percent over the 11-year period.

As newspapers have shrunk, so have their staffs. The *Lowell Sun* has weathered the digital storm better than most newspapers in Massachusetts, but its staff has nonetheless taken a big hit, going from 71 full- and part-time newsroom employees nine years ago to 41 today, a 42 percent reduction. Officials at the *Globe*, *Herald,* and most other newspapers declined to detail their staff reductions, but estimates by union officials and newsroom staff suggest reductions as high as 60 percent over the last decade are not uncommon.

Newspapers aren't the only for-profit medium that is struggling. The FCC report on local news says local TV stations across the nation have increased their volume of news production while reducing staff, a recipe that tends to yield more superficial reporting. Boston's stations, including the New England Cable News channel, tend to place a greater emphasis on accountability reporting, but even they have scaled back their coverage.

Despite the generally gloomy news about news, there are some promising signs. News travels faster now and individuals can consume it almost anywhere. Members of the public can also generate news and photographs themselves and post them to Twitter and Facebook. Universal Hub, a popular Boston-based website, aggregates content from scores of local blogs and news sites. A Massachusetts political candidate is now just as likely to reveal his or her plans on BlueMassGroup, the Democratic-leaning blog, as leak it to the *Globe*.

Foundations are pumping money into local reporting efforts. The Knight Foundation has given close to $13 million to 15 Massachusetts news initiatives. Recipients include Boston University, Northeastern University, Emerson College, the *Boston Globe*, and *CommonWealth* magazine. Local universities and their students are jumping into the news business. Boston University's New England Center for Investigative Reporting generates investigative reports for a number of media clients, while Robinson and his students at Northeastern churn out investigative reports for the *Globe* and the *Dorchester Reporter.* In addition to providing State House coverage to regional newspapers, BU is working with Emerson and Northeastern to provide local coverage of Boston to the *Globe.*

"Hyper-local" news coverage, which focuses narrowly on a single community, is one area where reporters are being added. Patch, owned by AOL, launched local news sites in Needham, Wellesley, and Belmont last year and now has about 75 sites in Massachusetts. The *Globe* has

launched Your Town sites in many of the communities it serves, and GateHouse Media is trying to expand the reach of its Wicked Local brand. Part news and part community billboard, these sites are vying to win the local news franchise that newspapers hold dear.

Warren Webster, the president of Patch, says there is room for everybody. "We're not trying to come in and replace them," he says of local newspapers. "I think they do what they do well, we do what we do well, and we can all coexist."

WBUR and its public radio rival WGBH are both aggressively pursuing local news programming. WBUR, in particular, has ambitions to extend its reach. General Manager Charles Kravetz says the station soon plans to announce a major investment in its news-gathering operations and distribution platforms. Kravetz says WBUR has signed a long-term polling agreement with the MassINC Polling Group, is collaborating with several groups on investigative reporting, and wants to expand the number of civic events it hosts each year. "We're going to be hiring reporters and producers for our digital operations and traditional radio," he says.

What's making WBUR's expansion possible is a fundraising system targeted at foundations, corporations, and individual donors that seems to be working. A recent fundraiser brought in $1.475 million with only four days of on-air appeals, 16 percent more than a fundraising drive last year that required eight days of on-air appeals.

Even as new news initiatives come online, it's unlikely they will fill the void created by the retrenching for-profit media. A study last year of a week's worth of news coverage in Baltimore indicated the new media landscape isn't as rich as it appears. The study, conducted by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, found that 95 percent of the stories containing new information came from traditional media, primarily newspapers. The new media, including Twitter, blogs, and local websites, were more of an echo chamber, amplifying the news that others produced. The study also indicated that Baltimore newspapers were producing less news. Comparing reporting on a 2009 budget crisis to reporting on a similar crisis in 1991, the study found a steep drop-off in coverage.

In Massachusetts, a case can be made that the *Globe,* despite its smaller staff and near-death two years ago, is more influential than ever, in part because the rest of the local news business has shrunk so much. The newspaper's reporting brought down former House speaker Sal DiMasi, drove legislative action on probation patronage, and reg-

ularly turfs up stories that government officials would prefer never see the light of day. Recent examples include reporting on pension abuses, corruption at a special education collaborative, Big Dig cover-ups, and Lottery shenanigans. The *Globe* doesn't cover nearly as much as it once did, but it still churns out important pieces and its Spotlight Team and new "flashlight team" of individual investigative reporters is often driving the political debate.

Globe editor Marty Baron is counting on that perception of quality to convince people to pay for news at BostonGlobe.com, the paper's recently launched subscription website, separate from Boston.com. "The very fact that we are doing distinct work, work that no one else is doing, allows us to offer a new website that contains all the *Globe's* journalism," Baron says. "We think it's something that has value and it's something that people need to pay for because it can't be supported otherwise."

Paul Pronovost, the editor of the *Cape Cod Times*, is not cowed by the times. He says his industry is going through the type of renaissance that hasn't been seen since Gutenberg perfected the printing press. He says news and information remain an important—and valuable—commodity. "I don't care if you beam it into their heads. If they can pay for it, you've got a business," he says.

Bob Unger, editor of the New Bedford *Standard-Times*, says he no longer can afford to have reporters covering each town in the paper's territory. But he nevertheless tries to frame the public agenda for his community. A good example was a seven-part series this summer that documented problems with the city's schools and compared the district to four similar urban school districts around the country that faced similar challenges successfully.

Waldman, the lead author of the FCC report on local news, says the new media landscape offers countless ways to distribute news more widely and efficiently. "I'm very emotionally torn because there are so many fantastic innovations living side by side with a decline in local accountability reporting," he says. "If we can save accountability reporting, we may end up with the best of all worlds."

Matt Storin, a former *Globe* editor and adjunct professor at Notre Dame University, says the shakeout in the news business is still going on. He doesn't know how the news ecosystem will evolve, but he predicts that news coverage will get worse before it gets better, largely because the public hasn't awakened to the importance of watchdog journalism and the need to support it financially. "Right now, the public doesn't understand they've lost anything," he says. CW

Dialing for Dollars

As nonprofit journalists look at different ways to pay for newsgathering, the IRS is also taking a closer look

BY GABRIELLE GURLEY

TRAINING HIGH SCHOOL journalists wasn't the first order of business for Joe Bergantino when he launched the New England Center for Investigative Reporting at Boston University. But as it became clear that he had to learn to think like a small businessman, Bergantino began to see the wisdom of incorporating younger students into his plan. The students would be attracted not just by the center's investigative reporting know-how, but also by the prestige


THE MICHIGAN MESSENGER
THE AMERICAN INDEPENDENT NEWS NETWORK


CALIFORNIA WATCH
FOUNDED BY THE CENTER FOR INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING


The Bay Citizen
NEWS / CULTURE / COMMUNITY


PENNSYLVANIA
INDEPENDENT
TU NE CEDE MALIS SED CONTRA AUDENTIOR ITO


The Austin Bulldog
Independent journalism in the public interest


PRO PUBLICA
www.propublica.org


MinnPost.com
A THOUGHTFUL APPROACH TO NEWS


voice of sandiego.org

THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

THE FLORIDA INDEPENDENT
THE AMERICAN INDEPENDENT NEWS NETWORK

THE LENS
Focusing on New Orleans & the Gulf Coast

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

of spending two weeks at a summer workshop backed by a major university with a well-known journalism program. It also would look good on a college application.

Little did Bergantino know that his summer program would turn out to be a way to help pay for investigative journalism. In 2009, the high school program netted only $14,000, but after some retooling and outreach to local, national, and international students, the center took in $110,000 this past summer and could possibly earn as much as $200,000 next year. "We've just begun to tap into a huge market out there that makes sense in terms of where we've located," Bergantino told journalists at the Online News Association's annual conference in Boston in September.

Just as for-profit media are trying to figure out a business model that works in the digital age, so are nonprofits. Hundreds of them have jumped into the news business, looking for ways to bankroll the types of reporting that have been scaled back or abandoned by struggling commercial operations. No one business model is likely to dominate, so letting a thousand flowers bloom is the order of the day.

Some nonprofits solicit money from foundations. Others tap wealthy benefactors, host events or galas, seek corporate sponsors, make direct appeals to the public, or partner with a university. A recent University of Wisconsin-Madison report on nonprofit journalism funding forecast "at least five to 10 more years of experimentation" before anyone can determine which, if any, of the approaches or combination of approaches are viable.

All of this activity has attracted the attention of the Internal Revenue Service. Several new groups seeking nonprofit status say their applications have been held up for more than a year, suggesting the IRS is trying to figure out if some nonprofit news activities are looking too much like for-profit operations. Steven Waldman, the lead author of a recent report that surveyed the state of local news for the Federal Communications Commission, says he is worried that the IRS may end up stifling nonprofit news operations.

Nonprofit news outlets range from "one-man band" operations to regional and national outlets.

"At some level, they don't want you to look like a commercial enterprise in any way," he says. "The IRS is basically saying you can be nonprofit as long as you promise not to have a sustainable business model."

THE NONPROFIT WAY FORWARD

Nonprofit news outlets range from "one-man band" operations to regional and national outlets, many of them created in the past five years. Some strive for objectivity in their reporting, while many have a clear editorial slant. The

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the country's major journalism funder, has awarded grants to more than 200 "experiments."

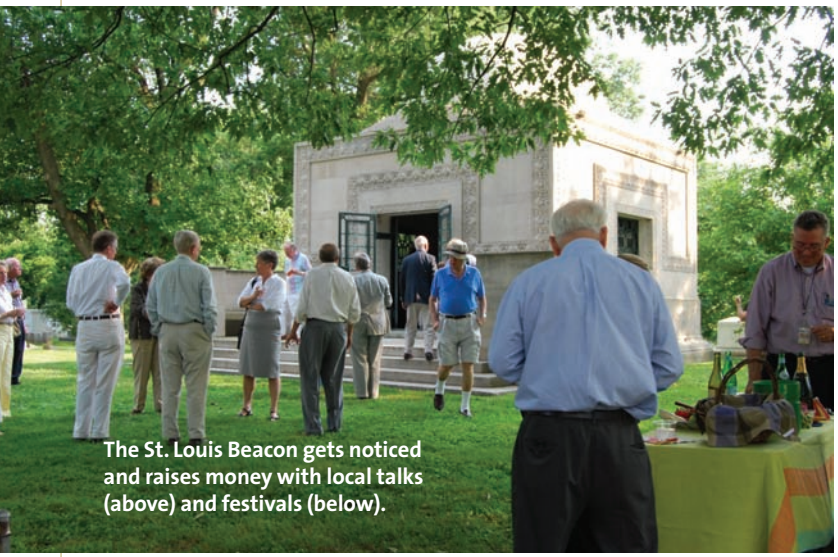
Some of the more successful news nonprofits are ones that were initially established by wealthy benefactors, such as the national investigative reporting outlet ProPublica, funded by financiers Herb and Marion Sandler, and the Texas Tribune, started by Austin venture capitalist John Thornton. The Tribune covers Lone Star State politics and public affairs. Although these founders with deep pockets initially prompted questions about the nonprofit's editorial independence, those concerns diminished as the news operations worked to diversify their sources of funding and editors and reporters worked to produce content that was free of bias from on high.

ProPublica, in particular, has taken great pains to build a firewall between its newsroom and the Sandlers. In 2008, the couple pledged up to $10 million a year for at least three years to the operation, the largest single commitment to a nonprofit news organization to date. The Sandlers do not see stories before they are published and don't have any input into stories, according to general manager Richard Tofel. Sites such as ProPublica and the Texas Tribune were among the least ideological among news nonprofits surveyed recently by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism.

More problematic for Pew were sites that continued to rely on the largesse of one major benefactor or group that nudges them in the direction of "partisan news or even political activism." Pew characterizes as "liberal" the American Independent News Network, which operates what it calls an "independent online news network." Its funders include the Open Society Foundations, run by investor George Soros. Similarly, a conservative group of 12 "watchdog" investigative news sites is supported by the Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity which, in turn, was established partially by the Sam Adams Alliance, a libertarian group.

STRONG FOUNDATIONS

Who do nonprofit journalists turn to for cash? Not every start-up can count on a single wealthy funder. Foundations have become the first stop for a simple reason: "That's where the money is," says Lewis Friedland, director of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center for Communication and Democracy, who co-wrote the report on nonprofit funding. Ambitious organizations that want to get



The St. Louis Beacon gets noticed and raises money with local talks (above) and festivals (below).

beyond their first year of operation are going to have to pursue foundation grants, he says.

The Knight Foundation parceled out 276 grants worth nearly $142 million in 2009. Other prominent foundations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Ford Foundation are also stepping in to fund organizations that are filling gaps in in-depth news and public affairs coverage.

Many newer nonprofits are looking to older nonprofit media for financial inspiration. The New Haven Independent, described as one of the field's "long-livers" at the online journalism conference, looked to National Public Radio for inspiration when it launched a nonprofit news site for neighborhoods in Connecticut's second-largest city six years ago. "When we say [National Public Radio] model, we mean a mixture of foundation grants, sponsorship supports, and [reader donations]," says Melissa Bailey, the publication's managing editor. "It treated us very well compared to sites that depend on ad revenue."

Both the Knight Foundation and a local group, the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, helped fund the New Haven Independent. The local foundation, now the site's major funder, helped get the site running with a two-year $21,000 grant. About half of the publication's current $575,000 operating budget comes from foundation grants, with about one quarter each from donations and affluent individuals. (Knight has also helped fund *CommonWealth* magazine.)

Currently, the Independent seeks "sustainers" who give $10 or $18 per month and "angels" who contribute between $250 and $1,000 each year. "Obviously, [foundations] don't like to support you forever," says Bailey. "The trick is coming up with new sources of funding and always change how you are going to have your next annual budget supported."

Heavy reliance on foundation grants, which are usually limited to between one and three years, is risky. Most grantors view awards as the seed money to give an organization the time to develop the independent revenue streams that are integral to long-term financial success and not as an ongoing source of operating dollars. Friedland found that a while a nonprofit may never completely eliminate the need for foundation dollars, the organization should strive to keep foundation support below 25 percent.

A novel approach to the foundation "ask" comes from William Schubart, a founder of the Vermont Journalism Trust, which merged with the in-depth state news site, VTDigger.org, last year. Instead of trying to solicit $25,000 to $50,000, he told the journalism conference audience, look for smaller grants of $10,000 to $15,000 from a foundation with a narrower mission such as child welfare or energy conservation. Then build a case to persuade the foundation that if it likes the published content (and understands that it has no say in the editorial process), it should consider funding the publication in perpetuity.

"[Schubart] is not making it such a big ask that foundations would shrink from the amount," says Jan Schaffer, executive director of the J-Lab, the Institute for Interactive Journalism at American University. "If anything, he's leaving room for them to increase their amount every year if they decide it can be good value in providing some type of social impact."

Nonprofits journalists cannot be shy about chasing after wealthy donors. Tofel, ProPublica's general manager, says the Sandlers have indicated that as long as the outlet

can maintain its performance (and the organization has already won two Pulitzer Prizes) they are willing to be significant funders of ProPublica for an indefinite period of time. "We always believed that philanthropy was going to be the bulk of our revenue," says Tofel.

ProPublica seeks both large gifts and smaller donations. More than 1,300 donors contributed to the operation in 2010, up from a little more than 100 two years ago. Apart from the Sandlers, ProPublica brought in $3.8 million in donations, nearly 40 percent of the funds the organization raised in 2010. This year, the organization wants to raise $5 million from non-Sandler sources, a goal ProPublica "will likely hit," according to Tofel. "We want to get to the point where the Sandlers are a considerably smaller part of our funding," he says.

ProPublica aims to build "a new cultural institution" that draws on major gifts and smaller donations just as art museums, theatre companies, or universities do. "All those [organizations] have earned revenue components, but do not exist without substantial components of philanthropy," says Tofel, who spends about one-quarter of his time working on the development front.

Moving away from foundations and into other revenue streams is not easy, as MinnPost editor Joel Kramer discovered. Kramer and his wife Laurie and three other families contributed $850,000 to start the online site in 2007. The site provides news and analysis of Minnesota public affairs and relies on a mix of national and state foundation funding, corporate sponsorship, advertising, and member dollars. It recorded a first-ever surplus of $17, 594 in 2010, with advertising and sponsorship revenues rising 42 percent from $217,734 in 2009 to $309,508 in 2010.

MinnPost wanted to be independent of foundation funding by 2012. It is not working out that way for two reasons: The organization decided to increase its 2011 budget from $1.2 million to $1.5 million in order to hire staff to concentrate on generating revenues. Readers also wanted more, and to meet that demand MinnPost hired additional writers. Currently, there are four staff writers and up to 10 principal contract writers. "It's extremely challenging to figure out how to even break even," Kramer says.

Under a four-year plan adopted last year, Kramer projects that by 2014, the organization will spend a little more than $2 million, with about 10 percent, or roughly $200,000, coming from foundations. "If you can get it down to 10 percent, it means you are relatively safe from being put at risk if you can't get it," says Kramer. "The worst that happens is you have to be 10 percent smaller."

THE IRS STEPS IN

The drive for sustainability is difficult under the best of circumstances. But the IRS is making that job even more complicated. In October, Kevin Davis, the executive director of the Investigative News Network, a consortium representing the interests of 60 nonprofit news outlets, testified at a Federal Communications Commission hearing in Phoenix that delays in the IRS review process for new organizations seeking 501(c)(3) nonprofit status had ground to a halt, "suppressing new start-up journalism nonprofits and endangering our movement."

The IRS has shown an interest in nonprofit news organizations that have applied for 501(c)(3) status, the section of the US tax code that journalism entities have traditionally used to qualify for nonprofit status as a charity that serves a socially recognized purpose. As such, a news organization does not have to pay federal corporate income tax since they provide educational benefits through reporting and analysis.

The Investigative News Network's application has been in limbo for more than a year, along with at least two others: SF Public Press, a San Francisco news site, and The Lens, an investigative news outlet in New Orleans. In the past, most applications for nonprofit status took no longer than six months, according to Davis.

Complicating matters further is that some for-profit media organizations are seeking to convert to nonprofit status. In a conversation after the hearing, Davis says that one theory for the delay is that applications from organizations such as the Investigative News Network have been bundled with those seeking conversions, and the IRS "is looking to create some policy around that." An IRS spokesman could not confirm whether the new nonprofit applications are being co-mingled with for-profit-to-nonprofit conversions.

Davis surmises that the IRS is also concerned about other issues, including potential revenue-generating collaborations with for-profit media. The IRS has had a number of questions about the network's revenue-sharing and distribution deal with Thomson Reuters, a for-profit news agency, and he fears that the IRS could reject the network's application based on that deal. Davis says that the network does not yet know how much revenue, if any, the collaboration will produce.

So far the IRS is focusing on new nonprofit applications, according to Davis. Organizations that already have nonprofit status have not been subjected to the same scrutiny. He worries that the network may fail to land grants it has applied for if it does not receive nonprofit status soon. The agency's actions might hamper nonprofit news organizations' ability to diversify revenues and limit the foundation and philanthropic funding that they could accept. If the IRS rulings move in this direction, they would have a "chilling effect on our ability to become sustainable businesses," Davis says.

An IRS spokesman says that the agency is "working on the nonprofit applications centrally [in Washington, DC] to give them consistent treatment." They are not on hold, the spokesman added.

Waldman, in the FCC report, recommended changes to the tax code that would make it easier for nonprofit news operations to become more financially stable. Davis told FCC officials that federal tax rules need to be clarified and simplified. Any tax code changes must be passed by Congress.

The FCC report says changes to the tax code would make it easier for nonprofits to become financially stable.

PUTTIN' ON THE RITZ

With the news media in transition, what happens offline is as important as what happens online, argues Nicole Hollway, general manager of the St. Louis Beacon. Last year, the online regional nonprofit news organization reeled in 20 percent of its revenues from events such as the Beacon Festival, a week-long spring celebration of free or inexpensive arts, music, and cultural events that are free or inexpensive.

Another event, a New Year's Day 2011 gala performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's H.M.S Pinafore featured local music luminaries and $500 and $750 tickets for a champagne reception, the concert, and dinner. The gala sold out. At the dinner, Hollway sat with a group of people who did not know the Beacon's web address, stlbeacon.org. She was surprised there was little correlation between people who read the Beacon and those made a donation to benefit the publication. People attended the gala because the event benefited an organization that they viewed as a "community asset," Hollway told the Boston online conference.

Hollway explains small staff shouldn't deter outlets that want to make a name for themselves in their communities. "If you find something that naturally ties into the topics that you cover or type of journalism that you do… that's going to be more manageable," she says.

Events are a "significant part" of the Texas Tribune's revenue stream, according to editor Mark Miller. Earlier this year, the publication put on its first-ever, weekend-long Texas Tribune Festival. The hugely successful ideas forum featured more than 100 speakers on state energy and the environment, public and higher education, race and immigration, health and human services issues.

The Tribune, expects to gross about $500,000 from the festival and basically "paid for nothing" to set up the event, says Miller, who spoke to online journalists at the Boston conference along with Holloway and Bergantino about new revenue streams. The University of Texas at Austin donated space and 27 mostly corporate sponsors helped foot the bill or provide other support. Tickets were $125 and Tribune "members" and students were eligible for discounts. The lesson he learned was simple. "Know your market," said Miller. "What works in Texas may not work in Boston or New York."

Indeed. A free ProPublica-The New School forum on narrative journalism earlier this year attracted about 500 people in New York. Another series of talks, including one that featuring two of the outlet's the Pulitzer Prize winning reporters, is also open to the public at no charge. "In New York, I'm not sure there's a money-making opportunity [for events]," says Tofel, the ProPublica general manager. "The field is so crowded…the numbers of things you can do every night for nothing boggle the mind."

BACK TO SCHOOL

Some journalists who have established news nonprofits, especially in fields such as investigative reporting, have found safe harbor at universities. Finding a partner at a school of journalism or communication improves a nonprofit's chances of survival. Universities can serve as fiscal agents, relieving journalists of the job of setting up a separate nonprofit. The institution can also absorb administrative costs like utilities, tech support, and office space.

A university affiliation is a "plus in terms of credibility," says editor-in-chief David Westphal of the California HealthCare Foundation Center for Health Care Reporting. The center, housed at University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, provides reporting on state health issues, such as implementation of the federal health reform law in small and isolated California counties. Seven journalists work for the center, which partners with other news organizations in the Golden State.

Single-issue news outlets have the potential to have good funding prospects, if they can attract ongoing support from a special interest foundation that is new to the media world. Westphal sees health care as a topic area where there is both money and plenty of interest. The outlet obtained a three-year, $3.3 million grant from California HealthCare Foundation two years ago. He is "hopeful" that the center can obtain another multi-year gift. "One question is whether [the philanthropists] in the foundation will hang in there longer than two, three, or four years and then maybe become long-term funders of the news," Westphal says.

High school programs aren't the only kinds of training going on at the New England Center for Investigative Reporting, which is also the country's first university-based nonprofit investigative news collaborative. The Boston University center offers an investigative reporting certificate program for international journalists. Students receive instruction in in-depth reporting, computer-assisted reporting, interviewing, and other professional skills. The center also offers professional development for journalists in the New England region. The training programs, along with content sales, comprise about half of the center's $500,000 budget for 2011. "I want to grow the earned income revenue piece as much as possible because that makes me more confident in our long-term sustainability," says Bergantino.

Paying for nonprofit journalism is still very much in a discovery phase. What is certain is that journalists who go the nonprofit route must create a craving for stories and information that readers cannot satisfy anywhere else. "The most important thing in the business of journalism today is distinctiveness," says ProPublica's Tofel. "People who are creating distinctive content are garnering audiences and with audiences can come impact and the ability to attract resources." CW

"The most important thing in the business of journalism today is distinctiveness."

15 Years

6,548,000 Lives Enriched

The Nellie Mae Education Foundation congratulates MassINC on 15 years of promoting the exchange of ideas in our Commonwealth. We stand with you in believing that education is the key to a brighter future for each and every citizen.

Nellie Mae Education Foundation

A novel idea

Tripp Jones, a lifelong Democrat somewhat frustrated with his own party, hit on the idea of creating a nonpartisan think tank and an independent magazine

TRIPP JONES TRACES most of his career path, including the founding of MassINC 15 years ago, to a chance meeting in Washington, DC, in 1986. At the time, Jones was in the middle of his sophomore year at Hamilton College in New York, and he was interviewing for an internship in the state of New York's Washington office. That interview ended with the head of the office suggesting Jones, who grew up in Weston, might have better luck across the hall at the DC office of the state of Massachusetts. Jones poked his head into the office and found its director, Mark Gearan, eating a sandwich. It was the start of a relationship that would lead to two internships in Washington, several jobs at the State House in Boston, and a career steeped in politics and public policy.

"Gov. Dukakis was getting ready to run for president," Jones says, "and Mark was getting ready to play a significant role in that campaign. I can trace everything that's happened to me professionally back to that connection with Mark. Literally, every experience I've had can be tied back to the network I began building through Mark and the Dukakis network."

Michael Dukakis had a policy of meeting with any intern taking a job in his administration, and Jones was no exception. Jones got to know Dukakis better during the governor's unsuccessful 1988 run for the presidency and later as an aide in his Executive Office of Administration and Finance as the state struggled through a budget crisis.

Once Dukakis left office, Jones took a job as chief of staff to Rep. Mark Roosevelt, the newly appointed head of the Legislature's Education Committee. What followed was two years of work steering the state's historic education reform law to passage, reorganizing the state's public higher education system, and eliminating Boston's elected school committee. That career high was followed by something of a career low. Jones ran Roosevelt's 1994 campaign for governor against then-Gov. William Weld, the most lopsided gubernatorial race in state history, with Weld winning by a margin of 71-28.

"Despite the big loss and how badly outspent we were, I still feel incredibly proud of the substance of that campaign," Jones says. "We put a book out framing the issues and in many ways a different approach a Democrat could take in confronting a lot of the issues facing the state at that time. Substantively, I walked away feeling really good about how that worked and at the same time really inspired about what was not happening in the Democratic Party."

Frustrated by the public debate and convinced that there was a need for some fresh public policy thinking and advocacy, Jones went on to found MassINC in 1996. He and his co-founders, high-profile businessman Mitchell Kertz-

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL MANNING

man and lawyer/political activist Michael Gritton, focused the organization on developing a public agenda that would promote the growth and vitality of the middle class—the backbone of the American experiment, as they liked to call it. They chose to engage like-minded Republicans as well as Democrats, business leaders, and labor leaders and were committed to focusing on the importance of private initiative and the private sector as well as public policy and the public sector.

After eight years of leading MassINC, Jones left in 2003 to pursue his interest in social enterprise and business as an executive with the Boston-based MENTOR Network. Jones spent the next eight years helping to build what had been a regional company into a national health care and human services network providing community-based services for adults and children with disabilities and special needs in 38 states. Ready for a change and passionate as ever about the opportunities for non-profit and for-profit social enterprise, he left Mentor at the end of last year to plan the next chapter of his work in the private sector.

While Jones has been focused primarily on his business work and his family, he has remained actively involved in local affairs and has not ruled out jumping into politics himself someday. When a ballot question surfaced last year attempting to repeal the state's controversial affordable housing law, Jones chaired the successful effort to defeat it. He has also remained involved in various education reform work as an advocate in the charter school and extended-learning-time movements. He has also remained on the board of directors of MassINC. He lives in Wayland with his wife Robin, his sons Hugh, 12, and Tucker, 10, and his daughter Eden, 6.

I interviewed Jones at MassINC's offices. This is an edited version of our conversation.

—GREG TORRES

CW: What prompted you to launch MassINC?

JONES: There were three formative experiences. The first was my work on the fiscal crisis in the 1989-90 period and just seeing what happened to some wonderfully well intentioned progressive efforts as a result of people losing track of the bottom line. And then going to work for two years putting together the education reform laws, particularly that K-12 1993 act, and working with and battling with all kinds of constituencies and seeing the way the political left was, in my humble view, neutered in many respects, compromised in its ability to be a force for change and innovation as a result of its very close relationship with constituencies that would drive what ultimately happened on a lot of those educational reform issues. So I walked away from the educational reform experience more cognizant than I'd ever been about the real influence of powerful constituencies and interests in shaping what happens in public policy.

CW: And the third formative experience?

JONES: The third was my work on the campaign, and once again seeing the extent to which on the political left the debate and set of options and topics that were getting focused on were driven by the powerful interests that controlled that part of our political infrastructure. That was certainly not the peak of Democratic influence in the state, to be modest about it. The party was in tough shape. The Republicans were driving what was going on around here. There was general consensus at the time that the Democratic political base had lost its way from a policy standpoint. I stepped back and sort of said there's got to be ways we can change the way we're thinking about the most important issues facing the lives of ordinary working people.

CW: What role did Mitchell Kertzman, the founder of PowerSoft and the chairman of the Roosevelt campaign, play?

JONES: It's very simple. MassINC would not have happened without Mitchell's leadership and his and his wife Julie's extraordinary generosity. Shortly after the Roosevelt campaign, he asked me what I'd like to do if I could do anything. I had spent an awful lot of time following the work of think tanks, going back to when I was at Administration and Finance and watching the way conservative Republican constituencies used think tanks to affect the public debate but more importantly to shape the way they were thinking about the issues that needed to be addressed at the time. And the way they used think tanks to generate new ideas, to lay the intellectual groundwork and foundation for policy initiatives. So Mitchell and I, who at the time shared frustrations with the political left, decided that it would be pretty cool to go off and create a different organization that would create a new progressive approach to issues affecting the state. I had watched the development of the Pioneer Institute, the way Charlie Baker and others were setting that organization up. It occurred to me, when I was at A&F, I thought we could use an alternative view to what they were doing.

CW: So you were thinking about something to counterbalance Pioneer?

JONES: Many observers and critics made an assumption that MassINC would be the liberal alternative to Pioneer. But pretty quickly into the process Mitchell, Mike Gritton, and I decided to take a very different approach. We decided that we wanted to create an organization that would be

Tripp Jones with wife Robin, sons Hugh and Tucker, and daughter Eden.

genuinely nonpartisan, that would attract the interest of Republicans and Democrats, that would get the financial support and backing of business, and hopefully some labor leaders, and individuals of all stripes. We wanted to create what we called a PC-free zone, a politically-correct-free zone where we could ask a lot of questions that we knew from our work in politics and government that you could rarely ask in an environment where there was always an agenda that was going to be connected to helping the Democrats do better or the Republicans do better.

CW: What about MassINC's focus on the middle class?

JONES: All of us felt America had gotten to the point where for the first time we did not have a middle class that felt confident about their future going forward and what would likely happen to their kids. Every generation up until 25-30 years ago had basically been able to advance economically, get ahead, do better than the previous generations. All of a sudden that was changing. We had a very well laid out essay-like document that sort of explained why the middle class was so important and the backbone of our society. It's what made America unique. A lot of other constituencies had groups that were set up to push the interests of those populations. What didn't exist was any kind of organization that was focused on the broad middle class, the silent majority as many people would often call it.

CW: How do you define the middle class?

JONES: One of the great things about the middle class in America is that people who may have done exceedingly well economically still think of themselves as having a sort of middle class outlook on life. So when we talked about middle class people we talked about people who had a middle class outlook, as well as people who fit into what we defined as the middle three quintiles on the economic spectrum.

CW: What does that mean?

JONES: There's a top quintile, people who are in the top 20 percent of income earners—and then people in the bottom 20 percent, and we sort of separated those guys out. We talked about those people who were in those three middle quintiles—the 20th percentile up to the 80th percentile of the economic spectrum. And generally we were talking about families who were earning anywhere from $30,000 up to, I think at the time, close to $100,000, something like that. I think it's hard to argue that in today's society those people at the 20th percentile really live a middle class life, have a middle class standard of living in Massachusetts. Given how expensive it is to live here, I think where it gets more interesting is at the upper end. I know an awful lot of people who may be making $150,000, even $200,000, who feel as though, in this community, in this state, at this time, given what they are trying to do, they are living what in their minds would be more of a middle class quality of life.

CW: Do you think the American Dream is threatened?

JONES: I think the evidence suggests it overwhelmingly. When you look at the broad majority of middle-class—working and middle-class—families and look at the challenges they are facing, particularly those populations of people that do not have educational attainment levels above a high school degree—or might not even have a high school degree, and there are a ton of those people that are around here—and you look at their ability to have any choice that can affect their future economic health, there are way too many people who have no choice, who are fighting like hell every single day to hang on.

CW: You made a decision that MassINC should do research and policy analysis but also get involved in a different kind of journalism. What was the thinking behind that?

JONES: I wish I could tell you that we had our own, you know, original work here in cooking up the agenda for what tactics we would use to do the work on the issues we want to look at. In reality, we just cribbed from the best

policy organizations in the country, and what became clear pretty quickly was that most of the high impact places had some version of a magazine. And I can remember getting together with Shelley Cohen at the *Boston Herald*. Shelley walked in and dropped the Manhattan Institute's magazine on my lap—*City Journal*—and it reinforced for us that magazines were something that good think tanks did.

CW: Was everyone on board with that?

JONES: We were probably lucky we did not have a board of directors at the time. When you are launching something, you know, you have got to make sure that whatever you do, it meets an impressive, serious standard, and so, to his credit, when Mitchell and I would talk about the magazine he would kind of look back at me and make that point. He said, "If you think it's a good idea, and you want to talk about how it fits in with the plan [for the think tank], let's do it, but you better make damn sure that you are talking about a legitimate magazine." I managed to persuade my sister, Allison, who was in between her first and second years of business school, to take that summer and to put her business skills to work developing a plan for a magazine—a new magazine, a different kind of magazine. She really did the work in putting together a very solid business plan for this kind of magazine. She did all kinds of analysis and research on magazines. We had a very good business plan for a bunch of yahoos who had never been involved in publishing anything.

CW: What kind of journalism did you want to do?

JONES: We spent an awful lot of time looking at other publications that organizations put out. We opted for public policy journalism with enough space to allow for the type of evidence-based analysis we don't get in our typical daily coverage. I think it's fair to say that it's maybe become a little longer form than we originally envisioned [laughs] with all due respect to our tremendous editors.

CW: Is it a house organ?

JONES: The single best decision we ever made was to embrace the idea of having real journalists edit and manage the magazine's work—not the business side of it, but the editorial side.

CW: So you didn't control the content at all?

JONES: No. It was pretty clear to us that going out and hiring real journalists to edit and manage the editorial content would help us to have a non-partisan independent think tank. We didn't want it to be a bunch of political operatives trying to do journalism. So it was very much a tactical decision.

CW: What did you think were the odds of success?

JONES: With the possible exception of our significant others and some family members, even our closest friends thought the odds of us pulling this off were slim to none. The concern was: Could the think tank really ever be nonpartisan, not just because of our background in Democratic politics but because of how Massachusetts works and has worked? Could we ever really publish research with world-class experts that would be groundbreaking and different? Could we manage the wide range of issues? And publishing a magazine? I know many people thought we were full of ourselves and setting ourselves up for all kinds of embarrassment and failure.

CW: As publisher, did you ever intervene in the writing of a story?

JONES: I honestly can say that there was never a time where I pulled a story as the publisher of the magazine. There were many times where I found myself in an extremely uncomfortable position of having serious concerns about what our editors were doing on a variety of issues.

CW: What did you do?

JONES: Most of the time I would try to control myself and simply accept the importance of the editors doing their jobs. In isolated cases, I made a case that I thought that the risks to the publication were so great in going ahead that the editor decided to think differently than perhaps he was inclined to prior to that discussion. I can remember early on a situation where we had just brought on a very well respected, high profile, internationally recognized leader on all kinds of important public policy issues who agreed to do an interview with our editor, to talk about some of the issues that he had been working on. And our editor did the interview and we learned after the interview that it was customary in that individual's experiences working with journalists, to have the ability to edit his own content. And we told him no. And I can assure you that it didn't make that individual, as well as the people that connected me to him, happy at all. It was extremely difficult. And it was one of the early, big tests that we confronted, and I think it all worked out for everybody just fine.

CW: I understand you also had a situation with a story about Sen. John Kerry.

JONES: In the case of that article on Sen. Kerry, I expressed my concerns, and really felt strongly that it would have been a very unfortunate stoop for the organization to publish something that was so, as I said, disrespectful, nonsubstantive, just over the top. And to the editor's credit at the time, my good pal Bob Keough, he listened to me and thought a lot about it, and he ultimately felt that I was making a legitimate case. He and the journalists then went to work figuring out a way to take that piece and make it a pretty good piece that got published.

CW: So the piece did run?

JONES: Oh yeah, absolutely.

CW: And how was Sen. Kerry, with the piece?

JONES: Never heard from him.

CW: Where do you think the organization, in its 15 year history, has made the biggest impact?

JONES: One of the things I'm most proud of is the mix of people that have been involved in making MassINC what it is. We brought together Democrats, Republicans, labor leaders, and business leaders—civic leaders of all stripes. In addition to Mitchell and Julie [Kertzman], I think of my pal Andy Calamare, who's been a coach to every one of the key players in the organization—and a most important member of the board, helping very much to develop this nonpartisan, independent model that we've pursued. I also think of the leadership of Chris Gabrieli—without whom this organization would not be around—and Gloria Larson and Mark Robinson from the Weld Administration, the late Jack Rennie, Gov. Dukakis—who, given the times in which we were launching the organization, had to keep his extensive counsel and involvement largely invisible. Sen. Tsongas, who had just created the nonpartisan Concord Coalition and provided all kinds of important input. Hubie Jones, Peter Meade, Rev. Ray Hammond. I could go on and on. I think of our first two institutional sponsors—then BankBoston and the Carpenters Union. The carpenters were picketing the bank at the time. Joannie Jaxtimer, who got her company, Mellon Bank, to be the first company to sponsor research. And our many other key donors, including Foley Hoag and Mintz Levin, the firms that have done all our pro bono legal work.

CW: But when you think back on your time, what jumps out at you? Is it a piece of research?

JONES: Yeah, well you know. No. 1, I guess, is the way in which we framed the analysis of what was happening to the middle class, mostly with Andy Sum and Paul Harrington over at Northeastern's Center for Labor Market Studies. That was how we put the stake in the ground. It was an incredible collaborative effort that allowed this organization to frame in a dramatic but fact-based way what was going on with the middle class. It also highlighted for people what the drivers of that reality were. It was also unique enough to New England, on the eve of a New Hampshire primary, that it really got peoples' attention, inspired people to talk about that problem, to get interested in what could be done to address it. We have updated and continued that work with Andy and his team on a regular basis. That certainly stands out. But there were other signature research efforts as well, including our work on community corrections and probation reform; the costs of living and housing in particular; the role of immigrants and immigration on our economy—and therefore the middle-class; education reform; and adult basic education and workforce development.

CW: What do you think MassINC and *CommonWealth* have accomplished?

JONES: In looking back, I think we have certainly changed the public debate on a number of critical issues and played a key role in mobilizing our political and civic leadership to address those issues. I am certainly proud of the legislation that we have helped get passed—the additional funding for such important investments as adult special education, for example. I'm also proud of the various ways our work has affected private initiative—philanthropic investment, companies deciding to make change, the way in which our research on the costs of living mobilized all kinds of constituencies to collaborate in addressing the need to build more affordable housing. One of the most important things that I continue to remind funders, and this is something that the conservatives get far better than people on the left, is that the best think tanks lay the groundwork for change that will happen many years down the road. The best think tanks do research, stay at it, understand that it's going to take, in some cases, decades to get that change to happen. And that's something that I hope that the organization continues to focus on. Just because we're not necessarily seeing change happen today, tomorrow, next year, or the year after doesn't mean that the work that MassINC is doing isn't going to ultimately be unbelievably valuable in making real meaningful policy impact.

CW: Do any articles in the magazine stick out for you?

JONES: My favorite was the work that our editors did pretty early on looking at the role of teacher unions in shaping what was happening in education reform. It was a tough piece that raised a lot of serious questions about the extent to which teacher unions were impeding the ability of the state to implement a lot of what was in that 1993 law. The story made a lot of people angry, a lot of friends of mine. The teachers union, which at the time was a financial backer of the magazine, pulled its financial support. To this day I still hear about it, and I continue to hear about it, and I continue to feel that was the best use of that sponsorship money.

CW: Does MassINC's work have relevance beyond our state's borders?

JONES: One of the things that makes the mission here even more relevant is that, as we look around the world, we're seeing middle class populations built in other parts of the world, inspired by what happened in America. It's happening in China, all over Eastern Europe, parts of Africa. Literally, continents all over the planet are now at a point where they are experiencing and having the capacity to experience what America went through years ago. They are inspired by our experiment. At the same time, America's at a point where our middle class, the great success story of this experiment, is in the worst shape ever, some might argue.

CW: What do you think of the magazine's shift toward more investigative pieces?

JONES: Just the use of the words "investigative reporting" scared a ton of people off and created all kinds of friction and challenge for you. But it came at a point when it was critical for the organization to have the courage and the guts to shake things up a bit. You've defined what you mean by investigative reporting in a way in which it frankly increases the credibility and enhances the reputation of the place. That's huge. Those are the kinds of risks that I would hope the organization would continue to take. It doesn't always make everybody happy. We've lost funders as a result of the decision to do that, but only if an organization like this continues to take risks, innovate, and change will it continue to get the support of the kind of people and organizations that it's going to take to fund and support what we're doing. So I hope that kind of change will continue. I fully hope and expect that there will be plenty of days where I get up, shaking my head, saying: "What the hell are they doing on this? God, that tees me off. I disagree." That's what this place was supposed to be about, and I hope there's more and more of that. CW

The good news about news

Collaborating is now part of a journalist's role, including tapping the wisdom of the crowd

BY ERIC NEWTON

WHERE THERE ARE people, there's news. And where there's news, there are journalists. Why? Because we have learned that when professionals make it their business to look at the world as it really is, we all benefit.

Here are some examples:

Two news organizations, ProPublica and National Public Radio, revealed that military doctors were wrongly over-treating American veterans who had concussions. Fixing this will save at least $200 million.

The Center for Public Integrity and the *Washington Post* exposed bad federal housing policies, and six big lenders were dumped. Taxpayers will save more than $100 million.

The Center for Investigative Reporting detailed earthquake hazards in California schools, and officials opened up a $200 million safety fund.

Three stories, with a social impact of more than $500 million. It's the value of watchdog journalism. Doing stories that keep government more honest is still a big part of the modern role of professional journalism. Where the press is free, corruption is low.

But there are new roles as well. These three stories are all examples of reporting by nonprofit news organizations. One, ProPublica, won America's highest award for journalism, the Pulitzer Prize, in each of its first two years of existence. Forming new kinds of news organizations is part of a modern journalist's role.

The stories shared here were collaborations. News people partnered instead of competed. For-profits and nonprofits worked together. Collaborating is now part of a journalist's role, including tapping the wisdom of the crowd.

The world is awash in a sea of data. We give people lifeboats of meaning on which to navigate that sea. Mining, curating, verifying, clarifying data is part of our role. The digital age brings powerful tools. New tools make new rules. That means new ethics. Do we have an ethical obligation to be transparent, to be interactive? Keeping ourselves honest is part of our role.

Some universities teach 21st century journalism: How to create and run media companies; how to work with computer scientists to invent digital tools; how to create cultures of continuous change, and how to interact with communities. Supporting good journalism education is part of our role. If we fail to engage the next generation we lose them—and our future.

Today, anyone with a broadband connection can create news, pass it along, critique it. We must tell the story of how people need reliable news and information to run their communities and their lives. We should tell people a lot more about how and why journalists do what we do. Promoting media literacy in the digital age is part of our role.

Industrial-age news lumbered off the assembly line, from journalist to story to newspaper to audience. By contrast, digital age news flashes through the interactive network. It's all different. Journalists can be citizens. Stories can be databases. Media can be smart phones. Audiences can be interative. Redefining our role is part of our role.

But professional journalists matter. We are as important as ever. Here is the proof: People keep killing us.

In the United States, we found a powerful approach to the murder of journalists in 1976, when a car bomb killed Arizona Republic reporter Don Bolles. Dying, he whispered the word "mafia."

ILLUSTRATION BY ALISON SEIFFER

Journalists came from all over to create the Arizona project. They finished Don's work. Exposed, his murderers went to jail. The journalists went on to form Investigative Reporters and Editors, a professional group that thrives today with more than 4,000 members.

So when a man with a shotgun killed Oakland Post editor Chauncey Bailey on a street corner in 2007, we knew what to do. We had to finish the story. We had to find the killers.

Journalists in California created the Chauncey Bailey project. They came from all media, nonprofits, and schools. They finished Chauncey's story about the shaky finances of a local bakery, tying it to killings and kidnappings. Three people were jailed. Oakland's police chief resigned after reporters revealed that police had been planning to raid the bakery, but delayed it. Then they covered it up because that raid would have saved Chauncey's life.

This summer, the verdicts came. The man who ordered Chauncey's murder and his accomplice were found guilty, sentenced to life in prison, no parole. The man who pulled the trigger confessed and got 25 years.

Prosecutor Nancy O'Malley said, "I would especially like to recognize and acknowledge the Chauncey Bailey Project, (which) worked diligently and tirelessly to ensure that the defendants responsible for these senseless murders were brought to justice." She added: "Violence against the free voice of the press will not be tolerated in our society." Ensuring murders go to prison is part of our role.

Is it all too much? With our new tools today, an individual journalist can do more now than ever. Our profession is limited only by our own imagination—and our courage. CW

Eric Newton is the senior advisor to the president of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. This article is adapted from a speech he gave at a conference in Moscow.

THE JOHN S. AND JAMES KNIGHT FOUNDATION believes democracy thrives when communities are informed and engaged. The foundation supports transformational ideas that promote quality journalism and media innovation, engage communities, and foster the arts. Since 2007, the Knight Foundation (KnightFoundation.org) has invested close to $120 million to spur media innovation. Of that total, almost $13 million has gone to 15 organizations based in Massachusetts.

THE GRANTEES INCLUDE, IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:

Boston University – To fund a multimedia investigative journalism program called the New England Center for Investigative Reporting. ($650,000)

CommonWealth – To expand the reporting depth and online reach of the Boston-based magazine, which is published by the nonprofit think tank MassINC. ($478,000)

Emerson College – To enable members of Knight communities to participate in the planning and development of public spaces through the use of the interactive game platform HUB2. ($250,000)

Harvard University – To expand and improve the Citizen Media Law Project at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, which provides legal education, resources, and assistance to individuals and organizations. ($250,000)

Localocracy – To support the Boston-based developer of "online town common" websites to enhance community dialogue in partnership with established media organizations. Localocracy was recently sold to AOL's Huffington Post. ($150,000)

MIT – To accelerate adoption of community news and information technology through the Center for Civic Media. ($8 million)

Nieman Labs – To expand coverage on Nieman Labs of new business models for news, media innovation, and community news experiments. ($200,000)

Northeastern University – To expand the Investigative Reporting Seminar into an institute serving community newspapers. ($100,000)

Order in the Court 2.0 – To show how modern technology can increase access to the courts with a pilot by WBUR in the Quincy District Court. ($250,000)

Participatory Culture Foundation – To create 17 open-source community video news sites that tap into public access television's structure and audience that could be repeated in other communities to create local video news sites. ($785,000)

PRX – To create StoryMarket, a crowd-funding platform for public radio, so citizens can pay for stories they would like to see done. ($75,000)

Public Laboratory – To launch a laboratory that will develop technology and toolkits for citizen-based grassroots data gathering and research. ($500,000)

The Boston Globe – To install and test OpenBlock, the revised computer code that replicates and then adds to the local data mapping functionality of EveryBlock.com. ($123,125)

The Institute on Higher Awesome Studies – To launch the Awesome Foundation News Taskforce, which gives microgrants to small news and civic media projects in local communities. ($244,000)

Virtual Street Corners – To use video reports of two different neighborhoods to spur civic conversation. ($40,000)

MassINC
RESEARCH. JOURNALISM. CIVIC LIFE.

CommonWealth
PUBLISHED BY MASSINC

We would like to thank our seriously funny friends

Serious Fun

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