

Community newspapers are vital

?A newspaper is a public trust, and we will suffer as a society without them.?

Michael Moore

Mark Pavilons



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The closure of 36 Canadian newspapers came a shock to many last week.

It was called a ?threat to democracy? by union representatives.

A swap between Postmedia Network Canada and Torstar saw a closure of 36 of the 41 acquired publications.

?In a stroke of a pen, 36 publications have been put out of business, killing an important source of news and information in all of these communities,? said the union representing the 290 employees who lost their jobs.

There were calls on the federal government to help newspapers survive the changes in information technology in this digital age.

There has been a decline in newspapers in recent years, given the popularity of social media, and the newspapers themselves offering online products.

?He who is without a newspaper is cut off from his species.?

P. T. Barnum

Rest assured, the King Weekly Sentinel, which has roots in King going back to the 1970s, will be here for a long time.

We are independent and part of a small chain of local papers. When the chain was acquired by London Publishing, the intent was to bolster community news, and the telling of local stories. It was about keeping the tradition alive, and improving the product. It was about giving people a voice.

I was charged with taking an existing, lackluster tabloid paper and making it the go-to newspaper in King Township. I've been here five years now.

It didn't take me long to get tossed in the deep-end of the municipality. I recall my first days vividly, and the warm welcome I received from King council and Mayor Steve Pellegrini. It was almost a shock to my system, not unlike those polar bear swims to ring in the new year.

From that very first council meeting, I?knew King would be different.

It took me a couple of years to get to know the geography and all the movers and shakers in this community.

My passion and respect for the volunteers and leaders of the King Township Food Bank arose early and I recall my initial encounters. My first meetings with Gary Vogan and Carol?Ann Trabert was the start of a beautiful, ongoing friendship. The Food Bank is one of my personal favourites in King and I?love the annual Sip &?Savour fundraiser.

I could name 100 people who I've come to know and love across King. That list grows each and every day.

Despite King's small population and small urban villages, there's a huge talent pool out here, in terms of interesting people and their accomplishments. In five years, I haven't run out of fascinating souls, neat projects or entrepreneurial marvels. In fact, I've only scratched the surface!

I've been in the journalism business for more than 30 years and I've almost seen and heard it all. After so many years, some careers wind down. When I arrived in King it set off a spark and that ember has grown into an incredible fire. My passion for our product, and even my writing, have both grown exponentially. Talk about teaching an old dog new tricks! Thank you to every new teacher I've met.

I'm not sure whether it's the air, water, nature trails and bubbly served in local restaurants, but King has that certain something. We should keep it to ourselves, but part of my job is telling these incredible stories and sharing them with the rest of the world.

That's what keeps me going strong. I'm telling other people's amazing stories and adventures. I almost get giddy when I encounter another great soul, regardless of whether they're an entrepreneur, philanthropist, artist or just average citizen wanting to make a difference.

While the newspaper business overall may be changing, I hope that interest in local news, at least in King, has increased over the past five years.

With power comes responsibility, and yes, I'm partly responsible for helping to document history, and share incredible feats by our citizenry. I help showcase King and its beauty to others. I help promote local business and serve up the news, sports and entertainment of the day. Yes, it's a lot to keep track of, but I revel in it.

Sure, the digital revolution is sending ripples throughout every industry and newspapers are not immune. People often ask me if community newspapers will survive. I believe they will, for the simple reason that no other vehicle will provide local news, sports and features. No other media will proudly support the Lions, ASK, CCKT, local churches, fundraisers, school events and sporting triumphs.

These are the lifeblood of a community newspaper like the KWS.

While some talk of the demise of print, I point to the abundance of speciality magazines available for almost every topic imaginable. I don't know about you, but I prefer to read a newspaper, spread out on the table with my coffee and bagel. There's nothing like curling up with a book or magazine.

To lose those would be tragic.

I can't even imagine those communities who will be struggling to fill the gap left behind by those closed newspapers. I can't imagine any small town without its home town newspaper.

Even if papers go digital, and forego the print version, there's still plenty to write about. Like McLuhan, I believe the medium is important.

And this future is in your hands. Readers consumers will dictate how they want their information served up to them. Let's hope the community newspaper remains part of that nutritionally balanced diet!