

COMMENTARY

Notes from readers



Note: Florida Weekly's policy regarding letters to Columnist Roger Williams is to run them whenever the letter writers are smarter than the columnist, or he wishes he had said what they did. Here are only a few that fit that category. Others will appear as space allows.

Roger,

I have to pinch myself when I read Florida Weekly. Am I actually reading a newspaper? The sense of unreality begins as I hover 'round the mailbox toward the end of Friday, looking forward to the week's issue. I just can't believe I'm reading such a publication here, in Naples. Don't let anyone tell you it's a "community paper." Unless, that is, the Village Voice is a community newspaper. Yes, I think you and your editorial team have that kind of potential.

I get all my news online. Everything. The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USAToday, travel and food blogs, trade newsletters, political blogs, just a whole lot of online reading that takes about three hours a day and sometimes a lot more, when I have the time.

I'm one of those people who says something you might not like to hear: I believe newspapers in their present incarnation are on the way out. I'm incredulous that people argue with me about it because to me it seems so obvious. And I'm glad. I don't

like the present incarnation of most newspapers, including and sometimes especially The Naples Daily News, though I have had many warm collegial relationships with various editors there over the years. And I feel sorry for those editors, although many have long departed and now work for you.

The really bad thing about the death of print newspapers is the unemployment of thousands of talented journalists and writers and photographers. And editors. Newspapers are dying not only because of declines in advertising budgets, but also because rates are too high for small businesses, and because the type of news that newspapers traditionally traffic in is going online and on the tube. So the answer is: local/regional newspapers with an editorial platform not found online or TV, with stories emanating from that platform that engage readers. Readers will buy it. Advertisers will support it.

That's what you've done with Florida Weekly. Of course I like that you're friendly to PR people who have valid stories. Why the heck not? I like that you have by-lined stories. I want you to run harder, more penetrating stories. Be a little more edgy. Stir it up. Don't be scared of, or too cozy with, advertisers.

— Beth Preddy, Collier County ("Rest in peace," March 4)

Roger,

Besides your clever take and a few really great lines, I agree with why newspapers are in decline and I'm not a newspaper person, just a lifelong reader and a writer wannabe.

I've lived mostly in small towns (LaBelle,

Arcadia, Palmetto-type places) and what people want to read about is PEOPLE — the more local, the more interesting! Who needs to buy a newspaper to read about Iraq, Obama and Britney? It's much easier, more colorful, and more current to keep up with such online. Heck, we don't even have to read but can click on the little camera icon and have our own personal talker showing us pictures (while we paint our toenails).

Put local people names in the local paper and local papers will sell. Is it really so difficult a concept? What parent with a child's picture in the paper doesn't buy-up every copy within a mile radius?!

In my unnewspaperyeducated opinion, all they would have to do to thrive is move Iraq, Obama and Britney to where classifieds are now and refocus all resources on what's happening within a 50-mile range. Areas like LaBelle and Arcadia are unbelievably underserved and would be so thrilled to see their people's names in print.

Fill editions with local stories: intrigues, deaths, births, crimes, businesses, court cases, foreclosure stories, overcomer stories, fishing-hunting-golfing-painting-whatever stories and then FOLLOW UP. When something particularly terrible or wonderful happens, report on it more than twice. People don't forget such things in one day. A desire for continuing information is a natural human trait (ala Anna Nicole Smith, Natalee Holloway).

We want to know about the economy, but wouldn't it be better, more interesting, more intriguing and gripping to know how it is specifically affecting one local business, family, or even segment of our local population than the whole of China, Chicago or L.A.?

Also, newspapers should constantly provide information for how readers can HELP.

People want to help people (at least I think we do, right? Gee, I hope so). Instead of focusing on delivering what wire services provide, local papers' main goals should be informing local readers what's happening inside their most local worlds AND helping them engage.

— Cynthia Mott, Lee County ("Rest in peace," March 4)

Roger,

Great article skewering that Middle School Nazi — I mean teacher. "Quashing young spirits" isn't what you'd hope for in the job description of our educators in 2009, is it?

— Ted Coine, Collier County ("Put a sock in it," Feb.18)

Roger,

I almost always enjoy your writing, although I'm not much of one myself.

This piece of yours on D.P. reminds me of the challenges of getting my son, 43 Sunday, through school. I also hear similar stories, from the same son, about my 13-year-old 8th-grade grandson, and school. They live in New York apple country near the south shore of Lake Ontario.

I agree, there are many gifted teachers. Unfortunately there are a few in any school system who can qualify as "village idiots" in spite of all their education. Such people always remind me of the comments of a collage graduation speaker I heard, who talked about the efficacy of the education system.

He pointed out that no college that he knew of had ever graduated a whole horse, but on many occasions colleges had given a diploma to the BACK HALF.

Roger, if you keep writing, I'll keep enjoying it. 'Bye for now.

— Dick Ludgate, Lee County ("Put a sock in it," Feb. 18). ■



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