

COMMENTARY

Cheers and jeers

The News-Item's cheers and jeers for the past week of news:

- Cheers to the effort by a group of local residents to honor police with their Spring Saunter/Walk to Support Law Enforcement on Thursday night in Shamokin. There was a great turnout, including the presence of some young girls who recognize the value of local police. It's always nice — no matter the cause — to see the community come together (and getting some exercise in a walk across town on a chilly spring evening — there's another plus). It was sadly fitting that on the same front page in which we covered the walk was the story on the child porn-suicide attempt case in Shamokin — a reminder of exactly the difficult circumstances that law enforcement face every day that were recognized by the walk.

- Jeers to the Trevorton woman who wreaked havoc with her Ford 150 pickup when she crashed it into parked vehicles along Shamokin Street (Route 225) in the village Thursday, resulting in damage to six other vehicles that simulated a NASCAR pileup. The crash occurred at the busy Route 890 intersection and very near the Trevorton Elementary School, so it's fortunate it happened at about 10 p.m. when the streets were mostly absent of activity. There's no word yet on what may have caused the truck to go out of control, but suffice it to say it's a reminder that responsible driving seems more rare with each passing day.

- Cheers to the volunteer organizers and players in the 13th annual Salvation Army Adult Benefit Basketball Tournament, held this past Friday, Saturday and Sunday at Shamokin Area Middle/High School. The tournament has become known as a highly competitive event with quality basketball players, including current and recent stars from local high school teams. But more importantly it's been a major fundraiser for the Salvation Army, which uses the funds to do its good work in the greater Shamokin-Coal Township area. The tournament represents an ideal combination of the lower anthracite region's love of athletics and its ever-present desire to help the needy in the community.

- Cheers to Southern Columbia Area School District's establishment of a Development Office — an alumni association of sorts that will tap the emotional ties, school spirit and wallets of past students to further Southern's goals as a successful school district. The fact that the office will be headed by a volunteer speaks to the underlying desire to help. In this era of teacher strikes, political budget battles and shrinking tax bases, public schools need to be creative in seeking new funding. Taking a page from higher education, Southern appears on the road to the development office mission of creating "a worldwide community of alumni and friends who will partner with the district in its continued pursuit of education excellence through philanthropic donations of money, goods, services and time." Good luck.

LETTER POLICY

- Letters to the Editor must be signed. Requests to withhold names will not be honored.
- Full addresses and phone numbers are required to determine the authenticity of a letter. They will not be published.
- Letters are subject to editing and should not exceed 300 words.
- Libelous statements and personal abuse will be deleted.
- Letters may be mailed or dropped off at the Shamokin or Mount Carmel offices of The News-Item, faxed to 570-648-7581 or sent via e-mail to andy_h@newsitem.com. Persons faxing or e-mailing letters should call to confirm their receipt.



Rebooting' journalism, a free press – 2.6 terabytes at a time

BY GENE POLICINSKI

INSIDE THE FIRST AMENDMENT

The rising global furor over the trove of financial records and other documents contained in the Panama Papers also speaks to any number of Digital Age canards about journalism and a free press.

Granted, none of the following have yet reached the status of "Aesop's Fables" in common knowledge. But they go something like this: "News is dead." Another: "Journalists don't matter." And a third: "Who needs the press — old mainstream or new online — when there's the web and algorithms to edit it for us."

Even as the resignations, recriminations and outcry gather worldwide over the leak of some 11.5 million documents from a Panamanian law firm — first to a German newspaper and then to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and more than 100 news operations — it's news professionals making sense of the massive data dump.

And news is, the intricate details of how some of the world's most powerful people use tax avoidance loopholes in various nations' laws, coupled with so-called "offshore" shelters, or outright skullduggery, to hide ill-gotten gains or remove legally earned income to low-or-no tax havens.

News with nary a trace of "click bait" fluff here, discounting the vicarious thrill of seeing Iceland's prime minister walk out of a TV interview when asked even the simplest question about his peculiar personal finances.

And journalists do matter when it comes to sorting through — and making sense of — a stupefying assembly of raw information and documents totaling 2.6 terabytes of data.

The total amount of leaked data from an as-yet unidentified source is the biggest in history, say several

news operations. WikiLeaks' 2010 release of classified diplomatic cables came to just 1.7 gigabytes. Edward Snowden's leaked data totaled just 60 gigabytes, the online Global Post says. (OK, I had to look it up: A terabyte is 1,000 gigabytes).

The leaked material includes 4.8 million email messages, 1 million images, and covers 40 years of the operations of the Panama-based law firm Mossack Fonseca, starting in 1977 — with 14,000 clients and 214,000 companies named in the files.

The stories just beginning to emerge from the maze of data already involve nearly 400 journalists in several dozen countries, who thus far have identified "140 heads of state, officials, politicians and associates" in the schemes, which are linked to people and institutions in 200 nations and territories, Global Post reported.

And yes, all of this does matter — even in this new millennium of 140-character self-expression and endless streams of electrons devoted to "news" of celebrity burps and bumps.

In addition to the on-again off-again resignation in Iceland, Chinese government censors moved quickly to remove any mention of the scandal from the nation's already heavily circumscribed online resources. Relatives of top Chinese leaders are linked to hidden financial operations, according to ICIJ.

And what of ICIJ, a 19-year-old non-profit group of reporters, editors and news outlets? Created as a project of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Public Integrity, its aim is to counter the increasingly global nature of major stories with — according to its website — "computer-assisted reporting specialists, public records experts, fact-checkers and lawyers."

In sum, just the kind of vigorous and effective watchdog role envi-

sioned by this nation's founders for a robust and free press. From challenging the nature of million-dollar contracts to private companies during U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, to reporting that as long ago as the year 2000, Pentagon leaders recognized the risks of having private contractors like Snowden with access to great amounts of classified materials, the consortium has been a new era global thorn in the side of those who once were considered too big or too distant to be held accountable.

There's no question that the Digital Age has turned upside down the economics of journalism, realigned the audience, and likely changed forever even the manner of how we take in news. But the Panama Papers illustrates that having journalists in place to gather, make sense of and then report what they have found is a required, resilient and valuable asset.

And it's not just this single example that's bringing new faces and new methods to news reporting. Sometimes alone, and sometimes in partnership with venerable news operations like The New York Times, names like ProPublica, Politifact and online powerhouse Bloomberg News now populate the annual lists of Pulitzer Prize winners. On local and regional levels, news partnerships reaching across media and linking one-time competitors are becoming more common.

To be sure, the disclosures contained in the Panama Papers are the news. But the manner in which it is happening also signals what may just be — in today's terms of art — how journalism and a free press "reboot" for the 21st century.

(Gene Policinski is chief operating officer of the Newseum Institute and senior vice president of the Institute's First Amendment Center.)

LEGISLATIVE CONTACTS

State Rep. Kurt Masser
(R-107)
Email: kmasser@pahousegop.com
467 Industrial Park Road
Elysburg, Pa. 17824
Phone: 648-8017
Fax: 644-7845
Hours: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Monday-Friday

Room 414 Irvis
Office Building
P.O. Box 202017
Harrisburg, Pa. 17120
Phone: 717-260-6134
Toll-free: 855-271-9386
Fax: 717-787-9463

State Rep. Lynda Culver
(R-108)
Email: lculver@pahousegop.com

Web: lyndaculver.com
106 Arch St.
Sunbury, Pa. 17801
Phone: 286-5885
Toll-free: 800-924-9060
Fax: 988-1672
Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Monday-Friday

412 Irvis Office Building
Harrisburg, Pa. 17120

Phone: 717-787-3485
Fax: 717-772-8418

State Sen. John R. Gordner
(R-27)
web: www.senatorgordner.com
10934 State Route 61
Mount Carmel, Pa. 17851
Phone: 339-5937
Toll-free: 866-339-5937
Fax: 339-5938

THE NEWS-ITEM
707 N Rock St.
P.O. Box 587
Shamokin, PA 17872

Business Office (570) 644-NEWS
Circulation Dept. (570) 644-6397

Business Fax (570) 644-0892
Editorial Fax (570) 648-7581

Online at: www.newsitem.com

Andy Heintzelman
andy_h@newsitem.com
Editor

Bill Kurtz
bill_k@newsitem.com
Circulation Director

Kim Moyer
kim_m@newsitem.com
Advertising Director

Tim Zyla
tim_z@newsitem.com
Sports Editor

The News-Item (USPS 796380, ISSN 2158-9410) is published daily for \$234.00 by mail per year by The News-Item, P.O. Box 587, Shamokin, Pennsylvania 17872. Periodicals postage paid at Shamokin, PA.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The News-Item, P.O. Box 587, Shamokin, Pennsylvania 17872.
Part of the Sample News Group family of newspapers.

TOM KUTZA PRESENTS... THE TIME MACHINE
THE NEWS-ITEM • 707 N. ROCK ST. • SHAMOKIN, PA 17872 • 570-644-6397

Back in 1956 ...

- George Jones, the Shamokin Junior Chamber of Commerce president, declared the organization's teenage rodeo had been a tremendous success in public popularity and in teaching young people about safe driving practices.
- The Keystone Fish and Game Association hosted 250 guests at the Moose Lodge in Shamokin, with Ike Fisher as emcee. Among the guests was Andrew Long of Tharptown. He was the secretary of the state game commission.
- Politics was much in the news, but did not seem to be exciting the local voters too much. In 1956, there were just 55,000 people registered to vote in Northumberland County.
- This was a presidential year; and a lot of people thought, as it turned out, accurately, that President Dwight D. Eisenhower would run again and win again. His challenger on the Democratic side was the same man who lost to him in 1952, Adlai Stevenson.
- The state Welfare Department in Harrisburg said it would mount a full-scale investigation into the Hoxey Cancer Clinic in Portage, between Johnstown and Altoona. Harry Hoxey came from Texas and had solid support from state Sen. John Haluska of Cambria County. Haluska believed Hoxey had a valid cancer cure. Investigation would lead to the closing of the clinic, despite Haluska's continued backing.

Tom Bradley, R.Ph. • 648-5242
605 N. Shamokin St., Shamokin
Shamokin & Independence Streets
Phone: (570) 648-5242 • Fax: (570) 648-3606

The Medicine Shoppe
What A Pharmacy Was Meant To Be.

Brought To You By: