

# PRESS PASS

September 2021



ISSUE 1

## MNA INTERIM DIRECTOR NEWSLETTER



Mike Gulledge

It has been four months since joining the Montana Newspaper Association as your Interim Director. Although I can still claim to be new at the MNA, my previous 36 years of newspaper experience

makes me feel at home again. Thank you for giving me this terrific opportunity to serve as your Interim Director and reignite my passion and commitment for the newspaper industry. No one does or can do what you do by consistently providing local news and information and I am committed that the MNA proactively support your publishing needs. Today the MNA is restarting the "Press Pass" digital newsletter to help keep you informed about our organization, our members, the industry including revenue opportunities and issues facing our business.

The good news is that the Montana Newspaper Association is fiscally strong and remains committed to the mission of advancing and sustaining the news publishing industry in Montana. It is more important than ever we hold steadfast to the mission while embracing the exciting technological advances and creating avenues to reach your current customers and new audiences. The MNA is driven by these aspirations: promoting the value of a free press to democracy; promoting the industry and readership across Montana; defending and protecting the First Amendment; defending and expanding public access to government records; collecting and preserving the records of Montana journalism and focusing on professional development including journalism education.

Thank you for your patience and understanding during the recent financial services cleanup. Our team has been working with the accounting firm WIPFLI

to pay our past due invoices, award late dividend checks and catch up with MNA member dues. Because of WIPFLI's expertise and history working with the MNA, the cleanup process is right on schedule. As an ongoing best practice remember to add the purchase order number on all future invoices to expedite the payment process.

Looking ahead we must continue outperforming revenue expectations and identify new advertising opportunities for our membership. We are also in the process of updating our website and reviewing proposals for a new MNA site. Additionally, the process has started to identify training and educational opportunities for journalists and advertising teams. We will also remain steadfast in defending the public's right to know. If you have any feedback, ideas or questions regarding the Montana Newspaper Association please contact me at 406-670-9819 or by email: [mgulledge@gmail.com](mailto:mgulledge@gmail.com)

Every day since May 6th has been personally interesting and inspiring working with the Montana Newspaper Association. This is an exciting and challenging time in our industry, and I have been very impressed with our member papers continued focus on being the premium local news and information provider in their market. The MNA staff, Sandy, Stacy, and Ryan are talented, experienced, and eager to work with members to meet your goals while supporting the overall mission. Additionally, special thanks to Anton Kaufer and the staff of the Daily Inter Lake for assisting with the creation and the production of this newsletter.

Thank you again for this opportunity and I look forward to working with you.

- Michael Gulledge  
Montana Newspaper Association  
Interim Director

## CONTACT US

MICHAEL GULLEDGE  
Interim Director  
Montana Newspaper  
Association  
406-670-9819  
[mgulledge@gmail.com](mailto:mgulledge@gmail.com)

SANDY MCINTYRE  
Communications Assistant  
Montana Newspaper  
Association  
[smcintyre@mtnewspapers.com](mailto:smcintyre@mtnewspapers.com)

RYAN STAVNES  
Member Relations and Guest  
Services  
Montana Newspaper  
Association  
406-443-2850  
[member@mtnewspapers.com](mailto:member@mtnewspapers.com)

STACY WIRTZ  
Business Development  
Director  
Montana Newspaper  
Association  
406-439-5825  
[stacy@mtnewspapers.com](mailto:stacy@mtnewspapers.com)



825 Great Northern Bld.  
Ste. 202  
Helena, MT 59601

# LETTER FROM MNA BOARD PRESIDENT



Chad Knudson

**G**reetings, Montana Newspapers! As your newspaper association navigates through unusual times, I want to personally thank you for the patience and commitment to our organization you have demonstrated over the past year.

As most of you know, 2020 was probably the best financial year in the association's history. A perfect storm of political and COVID related advertising added to an already solid year with the result of record-setting sales. At the same time, problems with accounting firms and transition and the abrupt departure of our executive director last March, threw the organization into a chaotic period.

Under the leadership of past-President Erin Leonard, the association moved quickly last spring to recover from the upheaval and to move forward. Nevertheless, as a large, statewide organization representing widely diverse publications and interests, it has become evident that decision making and change come slowly to the MNA!

Today we are fortunate to have veteran publisher Mike Gullede in place as a managing consultant as we navigate these transitional times. Mike's first task was to wrestle the association's finances into order. His focus on this resulted in our decision to enter a short-term agreement with the accounting firm WIPFLI to reconcile and bring current the last year's accounting. This has been a difficult process. Suffice it to say, we are all glad the worst is behind us. You should be seeing long-delayed dividend checks and advertising payments showing up in your mail-

boxes and bank accounts. This was job one, and we think we are about there.

At the same time, I have emphasized the importance of member outreach and communication. Many board members feel the suspension of the traditional Press Pass newsletter was a mistake given that nothing took its place. As we got our finances in hand, I directed Mike to prioritize member communication next. That's why you are receiving this publication. I hope you find it valuable. It is just the first step to getting back in touch with one another. Thanks to Mike, Sandy, Anton and everyone who helped make this possible!

Finally, I want to address the process for filling the executive director position on a permanent basis. As the hiring committee, executive committee and the boards have considered next steps, we have been forced to consider a wide range of options, as well as our current conditions. At this time the executive committee and hiring committee is choosing to take its time to both get the association's affairs in order and to find the optimal solution to leadership of our organization. It may end up looking different than the traditional model.

Please provide feedback about anything else you'd like to see or read about or any other concern you have for the association. We are all in this together and staying in touch makes us all stronger.

Thanks again for your patience in recent months.

We will be in touch,

- Chad C. Knudson  
*President MNA*

## ADVERTISING UPDATE



Stacy Wirtz

**T**he MNA offers a variety of advertising programs to fit your needs:

SQD Statewide Quarter Page display for \$2,995 with 47 member newspapers participating

SCAN Statewide Classified Advertising Network \$149 for 25 words anything over 25 words is \$4.30 per additional word with

67 member newspapers participating

SDAP Statewide Display Advertising Program ad sizes 2X2, 2X3, 2X4, 2X5 with 63 member newspapers participating

SOAP Statewide Online Advertising Program \$1,499 with 250,000 impressions with 38 member newspapers participating

We offer dividends quarterly to participating members on the revenue sold. If you sell a statewide ad as a participating member, we charge you 50% of the ad cost. If you would like to become a statewide participating member on one of our programs feel free to reach out to me at [stacy@mtnewspapers.com](mailto:stacy@mtnewspapers.com)

The statewide programs continue to be very successful for the association and its member newspapers. We look forward to having continued success through 2021.

Let me know if you need any additional information, thanks so much!

**Stacy Wirtz**  
*Business Development Director*

Montana Newspaper Association  
(406) 443-2850 • (406)439-5825  
[mtnewspapers.com](http://mtnewspapers.com)

# SERVICES UPDATES



## Dear MNA Members,

Wishing you a great end of summer 2021. We are hoping you have had some great successes in this year.

The MNA is working on creating a more user-friendly, technology-oriented experience for our valued members and advertisers. Here are some of the many ways we are doing this:

**1** We have hired a new accounting service, working on past accounting resolutions, and working toward the future with new automated processes to accelerate accounting functions. As a member, you can see quicker payments by sending invoices directly to [montananeewspapers@bills.com](mailto:montananeewspapers@bills.com) and attach Stacy ([stacy@mtnewspapers.com](mailto:stacy@mtnewspapers.com)).

**2** Please send Press ID requests directly to Sandy ([smcintyre@mtnewspapers.com](mailto:smcintyre@mtnewspapers.com)), for expedited processing.

**3** We are working on a newer, more user-friendly website. This is coming later this year. We also will be updating our sales and promotional materials at a later date.

**4** We are automating, and providing total quality management in many of our job functions to make your experience with us more business-friendly.

**5** Our communications with you are re-starting with quarterly newsletters.

We are also open to hearing suggestions of what is working well, and what isn't working well, to continually improve our services for you and the industry.



*With sincere appreciation of all you do.*  
**Ryan**

# SEPT. 2021 MILESTONES

## Anaconda Leader

- James S. Rosien took over as editor following the retirement of longtime editor Kathie R. Miller in December 2020. Rosien had worked as a Leader reporter since 2011. Miller had been with the Leader for 20 years and served as editor since 2007.
- The Leader also has a new reporting staff of Jay Wisniewski, Sidra Wali and Paul Johns. Wisniewski and Wali joined our staff in December 2020 and cover local news and feature stories, with Wisniewski also writing a weekly column that earned the top prize in the 2021 Better Newspaper Contest for Division 3. Johns, who has been with the Leader since June 2020 handling pre-press duties, saw his role expand to local sports coverage in January 2021.
- William McCallum became the head pressman at the Leader in December of 2020. McCallum has been with the company since 2012. He is joined by new pressmen Cash Wedding and Matt Pyles, who were hired in the spring of 2021.
- In June of this year, Leader staff were saddened to learn of the passing of Sally Campbell, who served as editor in the 1970s and in 2007 was the recipient of the Montana Newspaper Association's Master Editor/Publisher Award.

## Northern Plains Independent

- Northern Plains Independent publisher Darla Downs is now the sole owner of The Herald-News Inc. After a nearly two-year legal battle, the former majority shareholder relinquished her shares to Downs with lawsuits filed by each side settled in February 2021.
- Wolf Point's newspaper is finally "home" after staff moved the Indy's office into the former Herald-News' office in mid-August. The building stood vacant for some time and the needed repairs took longer than hoped because of to Covid-related delays. The staff are now happily settling in to their new "old" office.

## Sanders County Ledger



Kendra Jones (l) and Sherry Hagerman-Benton (r)

- Sherry Hagerman-Benton has retired from the position of advertising manager of The Sanders County Ledger after 41 years. She will remain with the publication as a historian and archivist and continue to write the weekly "Remember When?" column.
- Kendra Jones has been hired as the advertising manager. She is a graduate of Thompson Falls High School and brings with her excellent customer service skills and a great attitude!

# SEPT. 2021 MILESTONES

## Tobacco Valley News

- Robin and Steve Newman, owners and publishers of the Tobacco Valley News since 1994, retired June 1.
- Managing editor Krista Nemeroff and news editor Nikki Meyer are the new owners and publishers of the independent weekly paper. Nemeroff has been with the TVN since 2007, and Meyer began reporting for the TVN in 2011. Both have covered every beat on the community paper, including news, features, sports and photography.
- New reporters Rebecca Nelson and Chris Wilson have joined the newsroom. Nelson covers news and features, and Wilson covers news and sports.

## Wibaux Pioneer-Gazette

- 65 years and counting! 2021 marks Frank Datta's 65th year at the Wibaux Pioneer Gazette. Starting as a printer's devil when he was in junior high school, Datta is the paper's sole owner and one-man shop after his partner, Frank Burke, passed away about 20 years ago.
- Datta received the Master Editor/Publisher award in 1995 from the Montana Newspaper Association. He also served 10 years on the Association's board of directors and as MNA president in 1988.
- "We've never missed a publication," Datta proudly points out. According to the paper's archives, "The paper has never missed a publication since 1907, even in 1929 when the office was in a basement and a flood put five feet of water through the town. The paper was published in Glendive while the office was cleaned."

*Photos courtesy of Goldenwest Electric News, February 2019*



*Frank Datta puts the finishing touches on the Wibaux Pioneer-Gazette under deadline pressure. Behind, Gerald Job updates mailing labels.*



*One of the proudest moments for this newspaperman was being awarded Master Editor/ Publisher designation from his peers in 1995 by the Montana Newspaper Association, Frank served as MNA president in 1988.*



# MNA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## The Martinsen Family

**N**ow in its 128th year of continuous publication, the Choteau Acantha is the weekly newspaper that serves Choteau and Teton County. It was founded in 1894 in Dupuyer, Montana, then a part of Teton County but now part of present-day Pondera County.

A pair of Dupuyer businessmen established the “independent” weekly newspaper as an instrument to campaign for Dupuyer as the county seat, vying with the communities of Choteau and Bynum. As a name for their new publication, they chose the word “acantha,” derived from the Greek root “acanthus,” which can mean a thorn or spine. It is our understanding, though information is sketchy, that the publishers meant the Acantha to be a thorn in the side of the opposition, namely the communities of Bynum and Choteau.

Unfortunately for Dupuyer folks, the voters of Choteau carried the day and Choteau was named the county seat.

In March 1904 the businessmen moved their publication to Choteau and changed the newspaper’s name to the “Choteau Acantha.” In later years, the newspaper would absorb the “Choteau Montanan” and the “Teton Chronicle.” Strictly independent in thought today, the Acantha remains a sometimes-prickly publication, willing to tackle controversial issues, present compelling stories and chronicle the progress of Teton County.

The Acantha is published once a week, mailed out of the Choteau post office on Tuesdays and arriving in local mail boxes on Wednesdays. The print and electronic circulation of the paper is about 1,575 as of September 2021. The newspaper also publishes an e-edition once a week on the Acantha’s website. The e-edition is offered free to print subscribers and as a stand-alone paid service to e-only subscribers.

The annual subscription rates for the Acantha are \$37 for in-county residents, \$44 for in-state residents and \$53 for out-of-state residents. The stand-alone e-edition is offered for \$37 per year.

The Acantha’s general news website is free for readers up to eight articles per month. To find out more about the



print, e-edition and web services, go to [www.choteauacantha.com](http://www.choteauacantha.com), or follow us (Choteau Acantha newspaper) on Facebook.

The Acantha was once edited by A.B. Guthrie Sr., father of Pulitzer-prize winning Choteau author, A.B. “Bud” Guthrie Jr., who cut his teeth as a printer’s devil here before going on to become an accomplished newspaper man, author of “The Big Sky,” and screen writer. (Bud Guthrie’s grandson, Alex Sakariassen, who now writes for the Montana Free Press, was one of the newspaper’s summer interns under the current owners.)

The owners, since July 1990, have been the husband-and-wife team of Jeff and Melody Martinsen. The Acantha employs Jeff as publisher and advertising manager, Melody as editor and circulation manager plus full-time reporter and photographer Vonnie Jacobson, part-time reporter Courtney Duke Graves and part-time printer and photo editor Don La-Baugh. In the coming months, the Martinsens hope to hire an assistant publisher and will be hiring a full-time reporter/photographer after Jacobson retires in 2022.

Jeff, a native of Castle Rock, Washington, has lived in Montana since 1980. He graduated from Choteau High School in 1983 and then earned a business degree with a minor in personnel management from Western Montana

### A LONG HISTORY

Now in its 128th year of continuous publication, the Choteau Acantha is the weekly newspaper that serves Choteau and Teton County.

### FAMOUS FORERUNNERS

once edited by A.B. Guthrie Sr., father of Pulitzer-prize winning Choteau author, A.B. “Bud” Guthrie Jr., newspaper man, author of “The Big Sky,” and screen writer.

### A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

The owners, since July 1990, have been the husband-and-wife team of Jeff and Melody Martinsen. The Acantha employs Jeff as publisher and advertising manager, Melody as editor.



# MNA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

College at Dillon, graduating in 1987. He then worked as a smokejumper for the U.S. Forest Service, doing 48 lifetime jumps in the fire seasons of 1987 and 1988. After his training in Missoula, he was stationed at Grangeville, Idaho.

Melody, raised on a ranch at Bynum, is a lifelong Montana resident. She is also a 1983 graduate of Choteau High School (and no, Jeff and Mel weren't high school sweethearts) and earned a print journalism degree with a minor in Russian from the University of Montana in 1987. She was the SDX/SPJ 1987 outstanding graduate from the J-School.

After finishing her last final on Friday, she cleaned out her apartment and over the weekend moved to Great Falls, starting work at the Great Falls Tribune on Monday as the education and health beat reporter and weekend reporter. She worked on that beat for about two years and then transitioned to the court beat, covering justice, state and federal district courts in Cascade County. Her first week on the new beat, she managed to get cited for contempt of court for re-entering a probation revocation hearing for a drug dealer after the judge told her to leave. Her

took home on Sept. 8. The MNA Board met in Choteau that fall because that was the year Melody was the president. The board hosted a baby shower for Melody and Jeff at the board meeting and did baby-viewing through the window of the Martinsens' home.

Jeff and Melody have never been gone from Choteau for more than five and a half consecutive days at a time in the past 31 years.

The Martinsens are both past presidents of the Montana Newspaper Association. Jeff continues to serve as the president of the Montana Newspaper Advertising Service. Melody is the chairwoman of the Montana Newspaper Foundation Board. She also serves as the chairwoman of the Montana Freedom of Information Hotline Board.

The MNA Board recognized the Martinsens with the Master Editor Publisher Award in 2010. The newspaper has won the Division II weekly General Excellence award several times in the Montana Better Newspaper Contest, most recently in 2020 and 2021, and won the Thomas

*“The Martinsens, now in their mid-50s, have owned the Acantha longer than any of the previous owners in its 128-year history...”*

editors at the Tribune sent her back in to protest the closure of the hearing. The Tribune paid her fine and she made the front page, but not in the way she'd hoped. She remains a footnote in Montana law books.

Jeff and Melody were married in May of 1989, and Jeff left smokejumping behind, going to work in Great Falls for a construction subcontractor as the firm's bookkeeper.

One evening in the winter of 1990, their phone rang. The owner of the Choteau Acantha, Dick Nordhagen, was calling to ask whether they'd like to buy their hometown paper. He had had a heart attack and needed to retire. None of his children and none of his employees wanted to buy the paper, so he reached out to the Martinsens. They were 24 and had been married for not quite one year. They said “Yes!”

The Martinsens took ownership of the paper on July 1, 1990, and have been working continuously ever since. They have never missed a single publication of the paper, not even when Melody gave birth to their only child, son Madison, six weeks early on a Saturday afternoon on Aug. 17, 1996. They left him at the hospital on Sunday to come back and put the paper out on Monday. They made 22 consecutive trips to Great Falls, every day after work, spending the evening and part of the night with their baby, whom they

Dimsdale Sweepstakes Award for best weekly newspaper in all divisions in 2006.

The Martinsens have been 4-H leaders (photography and horse) in the Teton County 4-H program and are active in the Choteau Chamber of Commerce. They are both mid-distance runners, active with the local running club, and Jeff enjoys throwing horseshoes in a local league while Melody plays clarinet in the Choteau and Great Falls community bands.

Their son earned his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Montana State University in Bozeman in 2021 and is now employed at Spika Design and Manufacturing in Lewistown so they have become true empty nesters this year. (He still takes photos for the newspaper when he's available.)

The Martinsens, now in their mid-50s, have owned the Acantha longer than any of the previous owners in its 128-year history and would like to sell the Acantha within the next five years. They are searching for prospective buyers who would love and cherish the Acantha as they have and who would work to keep the newspaper vibrant and healthy and support efforts to improve the quality of life for all of Teton County's residents by putting down roots here and becoming active members of the community.

## PROMOTIONAL CALENDAR

### SEPTEMBER

- Sept. 22:** American Businesswomen's Day
- Sept. 25:** National Public Lands Day, National Hunting and Fishing Day
- Sept. 26:** National Pancake Day
- Sept. 28:** National Voter Registration Day
- Sept. 29:** Veterans of Foreign Wars Day, National Coffee Day, National Women's Health & Fitness Day

### OCTOBER

- Oct. 1:** National Manufacturing Day
- Oct. 4:** National Taco Day
- Oct. 8:** National Hero Day
- Oct. 9:** National Motorcycle Ride Day
- Oct. 10:** World Mental Health Day, Pastor Appreciation Day
- Oct. 11:** Native American Day
- Oct. 12:** National Farmer's Day
- Oct. 13:** National Take Your Parents to Lunch Day
- Oct. 15:** Boss's Day
- Oct. 16:** National Sports Day
- Oct. 20:** Support Your Local Chamber of Commerce Day
- Oct. 28:** National Chocolate Day
- Oct. 31:** Halloween

### NOVEMBER

- Nov. 3:** National Stress Awareness Day
- Nov. 5:** National Doughnut Day
- Nov. 7:** Daylight Saving Time Ends
- Nov. 11:** Veterans Day
- Nov. 15:** National Philanthropy Day
- Nov. 16:** National Fast-Food Day
- Nov. 18:** National Rural Health Day
- Nov. 20:** National Adoption Day
- Nov. 25:** Thanksgiving
- Nov. 26:** Black Friday Shopping Day
- Nov. 27:** Small Business Saturday Shopping Day
- Nov. 29:** Cyber Monday Shopping Day
- Nov. 30:** National Day of Giving

## FOIA Column/Update On Legislative Legal Action Column



David McCumber

**N**obody ever said suing a legislative committee chairman was going to be easy.

But a coalition of media companies and organizations, including the Montana Newspaper

Association, did it anyway this year, suing House Judiciary Committee Chairman Barry Usher, R-Billings, in February in an attempt to correct what was an unabashedly deliberate effort to subvert settled law that makes committee caucus meetings open.

We filed suit after Usher recessed a meeting of the Judiciary Committee in February, and gathered with a group of committee Republicans in a room in the basement of the Capitol. The meeting occurred ahead of votes on controversial bills dealing with abortion and transgender health care.

Three Republicans were told to stay outside the room to intentionally remain below a majority of committee members, which would require the meeting to be open, as per Montana law.

Republicans held a 12-to-5 advantage over Democrats on the committee.

Usher told Mara Silvers, a reporter for the Montana Free Press who tried to enter the room, that the meeting was closed because more than half of the committee was not present. Usher told the Montana State News Bureau that day that it was his policy that "when we do caucus, we will not have 50% or more" so that press access could be blocked.

"Some of the things we have to talk about when we're talking and discussing how we're going to vote are personal and you know, as you can see, our committee does get a little emotional," Usher said then.

Well we certainly want to protect those legislators' feelings, don't we?

Plaintiffs in the suit are The Montana Newspaper Association; The Montana Broadcasters Association; Lee Montana newspapers (The Billings Gazette, The Montana Standard, The Helena Inde-

pendent Record, The Missoulian and the Ravalli Republic); the Associated Press; the Bozeman Chronicle; and Hagadone Media Montana (Daily Inter Lake, Hungry Horse News, Whitefish Pilot, Bigfork Eagle, Lake County Leader, The Western News, Clark Fork Valley Press, Mineral Independent) We are represented by Mike Meloy, who has done so much incredible work for Montana media over the years in the interest of open meetings, FOIA and other First Amendment issues.

But in July, District Judge Mike Menahan dismissed the case, saying that the media plaintiffs were asking him "to redefine 'quorum' as a 'majority of a majority.'"

Usher said, "I'm glad to see the court agree with the very clear fact that a fraction of a quorum is not a quorum and the members of my committee talking together followed Montana law."

Meloy responded at the time, "If there is one basic indisputable principle underlying our open meetings jurisprudence it is that both the statute and the Constitution must be liberally construed . . . It is particularly unfortunate that Usher's actions were specifically designed to avoid public scrutiny."

Within a week, plaintiffs were polled, and the decision to appeal Menahan's ruling to the Montana Supreme Court was made. The case is awaiting a hearing there. We'll keep you posted – and the MNA Legal Affairs committee is grateful to the organization as a whole for the support.

\* One more First Amendment-related item: I'd like to take an informal survey. How accessible has the Gianforte Administration been to your newspaper so far? I'm interested in response to FOIA, willingness to answer questions, accessibility of Gianforte and his department heads, etc. If you could compare this administration with the last, how does it stack up? We'd love to have any anecdotes or details you'd like to share. You can send them to me at david.mccumber@mtstandard.com

Thanks in advance for your participation.

**David McCumber**

*Editor and General Manager, The Montana Standard*

*Regional Editor, Lee Enterprises, Mountain West*