

Monitor Editor Sees Closing Of Argus As “A Tragic Loss”

By Mike Pride
Concord Monitor editor

From the July 20 Concord Monitor

When a newspaper dies, a community loses its voice. It loses the mirror in which it examined its best features and its worst. It loses the bulletin board for news of a neighbor's death or a school-girl's scholarship. It loses its watchdog, the reporters who kept tabs on town hall, the school board, local elections.

When a newspaper dies, a community becomes less of a community. It suffers a blow from which it is difficult to recover.

Last week, when the *Argus-Champion* announced that it was going under, I felt that blow as both a journalist and a member of the community. This is the 11th summer that I have lived in a pond-side camp in Goshen, which is about 10 miles from Newport, the *Argus's* original base. I have relied on the paper for many things, though not as many as full-time residents have.

When I moved to New Hampshire in 1978, one of the first journalists I met was Ed DeCourcy, then the editor of the *Argus*. Ed was a robust, good-natured man with a signature bow tie and a fierce devotion to community journalism. He was also living proof of the value of journalistic independence.

Once, when some advertisers threatened to boycott the paper after the *Argus* endorsed a candidate they opposed, Ed wrote: “A publication that would surrender to any financial pressure, however great or small, to espouse a cause in which it did not believe, to remain silent on an issue about which it had convictions, to withhold legitimate news, or to publish material that had no news value, is not a newspaper. It is a prostitute.”

Ed left the *Argus's* editor's chair more than a quarter-century ago and died in 2005 at the age of 93. It is a tribute to him and his paper that old-time *Argus* readers mentioned him by name as news of the paper's closing spread.

The *Argus* changed after Ed's day. It expanded its base into wealthier towns, including Sunapee and New London, and moved its office out of Newport. Some Newport residents rued the loss of hometown identity, but the *Argus* still paid close attention to their town. On this week's front page, near the note about the paper's demise, the lead story recounted the celebration of Andrea Thorpe's 20th anniversary as town librarian.

Tying towns together

The broadened readership area tended to tie disparate communities together. Almost every town had a weekly columnist who kept track of everything from birthdays to charity book sales to Old Home Day preparations. [Charlie Darling assembled a weekly column about Andover from news gleaned from the *Beacon*.] But the paper was small enough that you could easily scan all the town

columns to keep up with the news.

Its pages were full of useful news. In either an ad or the news columns, the *Argus* informed readers when Bartlett's was opening for blueberrying and what band was playing at the Anchorage. It acted as a Fourth of July planning guide for fireworks lovers willing to rove from town to town.

Like all good weeklies, it covered milestones – graduations, anniversaries, obituaries. It told parents when to register the kids for Little League or kindergarten. And it had an old-fashioned sports page that took all local athletics and athletes seriously.

The *Argus* retained a good eye for the minutia that inquiring minds wanted to know. Readers could tsk-tsk about the motorist nabbed doing 93 on I-89 in Sutton. Before the real estate market went bust, they could find out what outrageous price someone had just paid for the neighbor's house.

Readers could also depend on the paper for a sense of continuity. Roger Small's weekly column sampled back issues of the *Argus*. Small might report on Teddy Roosevelt's visit to Newport. Or, as he did in an item picked up this week from 1908, he might write: “The rumor that Chester Hopkins, the Boston boy, had the measles was unfounded, as he only had prickly heat.”

The heart of the *Argus* remained its focus on town affairs, civic and communal. It was primarily a newspaper, whether it was covering the opening of a general store, an arrest in a local robbery or a dispute over an out-of-town developer's lavish designs. The *Argus* gave you the feeling that its reporters were everywhere at once.

Losing money

The note from Publisher Harvey D. Hill announcing the paper's closing was terse. We're sorry, but the paper is losing money and we're closing it, he wrote. He mentioned the trends that are affecting newspapers everywhere: “We see more and more of our readers and advertisers migrating to the internet.”

This is no doubt true, but *Argus* readers – people who care about their communities – are about to lose something the internet cannot replace. Heck, in Goshen, if there's a way to get high-speed internet, I haven't found it. Even where it is available, it offers nothing to rival the *Argus* as a local newspaper.

Through more than a century and a half, the *Argus* has been a reliable source of the most important information in the daily lives of its readers. It has been the tie that binds diverse towns into a community. In a chaotic world, it has kept people with common interests on the same page and provided them with a free forum to sound off about public issues.

These are the sad facts behind the
See *Argus* on page 13

[This letter appeared in *The Argus-Champion* in July.]

Dear *Argus-Champion* Readers:

It is with profound sadness that I advise you that the *Argus-Champion* will cease publishing on July 30, 2008.

We see more and more of our readers and advertisers migrating to the Internet. This, coupled with the rapidly rising cost of newsprint is causing us to lose money each and every month. By January 1, 2009 our newsprint will have risen by 49% in just 13 months.

We are not alone. The *Albuquerque Tribune* shut its doors earlier this year, a paper that won a Pulitzer Prize in 1994. It is reported by Hearst Corporation that the *San Francisco Chronicle* is losing \$1 million a week. The McClatchy Company, owner of the *Miami Herald* and others announced last week plans to eliminate about 1,400 jobs.

We are truly sorry to have to make this announcement. We feel a heavy burden, shutting down a newspaper that has been in existence for 185 years.

Our regular subscribers will be receiving a letter from us shortly, giving you options on your prepayments.

Harvey D. Hill

Publisher

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The Swap Shop will be open on August 9 from 8 AM to 2 PM and welcomes (before 1 PM) reusable items in working condition like toys, clothing, books, bicycles, and kitchenware. Please, **no** upholstered furniture, tires, windows, doors, electronics, or porcelain fixtures.

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