

Holidays from page 1

For our production staff – that’s me, mostly – going to press moments after Thanksgiving and again moments after Christmas has meant four years of being barely present for two of the big family holidays each year. This gives me a welcome break at an important time of year.

Deadline For Holidays 2008 Issue

The deadline for articles, photos, and ads every month is usually the 15th. For the Holidays 2008 issue we’ll move that to Wednesday, November 19 – but if you can possibly get things to us earlier than that, please do!

And as always, if there’s an event that happens after the deadline, just let us know in advance how soon after the deadline you can get us the article and photos covering that event. That way we can plan to include it even though it’s “late.”

For the February 2009 issue, the

THE 15TH!!!!
Please have everything to the Beacon by the 15th of each month!

deadline will be January 15, as usual. But again, earlier is always much, much better!

Other Rearrangements

For our local donors who support the Beacon every year with a check – the handy “Get a Round Tuit” envelope that’s usually in the January issue will be in the February issue this year. You can wait until then to make your annual donation, or if you’d prefer to have it fall in 2008 you can send a check at any time to PO Box 149, Andover 03216.

For our advertisers who have earned discounts on their ads by prepaying for a specific number of “months” – for example, June 2008 through May 2009 – we will of course extend your run by one month to make up for the month that disappeared. And from now on, we’ll be offering discounts for prepaying for a certain number of “issues,” not months.

The idea of a combined holiday issue of the Beacon isn’t carved in stone. We’ll try it this year and see what kind of feedback we get before deciding about Holidays 2009. So let us know what you think!

Beacon Celebrates 50th Issue

By Charlie Darling
Beacon staff

It’s hard to believe, but it was 50 issues ago, in October of 2004, that *The Andover Beacon* appeared in mailboxes again. (An earlier incarnation of the *Beacon* had been published for 12 years before closing in 2002). To mark this milestone, it’s worth taking a look at what we’ve accomplished to date and where we’re headed.

From the moment the former *Beacon* announced it was closing, it became clear to people around town, myself included, how important a good local newspaper is. In talking with many of those people, I found a consensus building around a few key ideas:

- A newspaper focused on a community the size of Andover can’t prosper as a for-profit business – balancing the books and providing a reasonable return to its shareholders would be nearly impossible.
- Instead, a community newspaper could be a great non-profit community project, involving many people of many types in every aspect of its operation.
- As a community project, a newspaper would have to earn the trust and respect of the whole community by reflecting the diversity of opinion in the community, by being respectful of all opinions, and by not taking sides.
- A newspaper is most valuable to a community when it appears in everyone’s home without him or her having to take the initiative to seek it out.

With those ideas in mind and with the backing of our first Board of Directors – Robin Boynton, Judy Evans, Bryan Johnson, Nan Kaplan, and Chuck Will – Community Publishing of Andover, Inc. was formed as a New Hampshire non-profit corporation with the express mandate to serve the community of Andover.

The company’s first – and to date, only – priority was to publish a community newspaper for Andover, and it has done that. The plan was for a new iteration of the *Beacon* that would stand on three legs:

- **Content:** The *Beacon* would be about Andover and things in the area of particular interest to Andover residents. You wouldn’t find regional, state, or national topics in the *Beacon* unless there were a specifically “Andover” angle to them. We would need that space for articles and photos about every aspect of living in Andover.
- **Volunteers:** As a community project, the *Beacon* would rely heavily on volunteers. We would have no paid writers, editors, or photographers. I would take a salary, since the *Beacon* would be my full-time job, and our small ad-sales team would get a commission for their efforts. Other than that, we would rely on community volunteers to make the *Beacon* happen every month.

• **Finances:** To balance the books and keep the paper going, it would take a lot of advertisers and a lot of donors – neither category by itself would be enough to ensure the paper’s long-term stability.

How’s That Working Out For You?

In retrospect, it appears that it wasn’t a bad plan. Based on the feedback I get from people around town, the content of the *Beacon* seems to be about right. I know there’s tons more depth we could be providing in our coverage of everything from town government to kids’ sports, but “going there” brings us to the second of the three legs the *Beacon* stands on: volunteers.

Obviously, we’ve done well enough in the area of voluntarism that we’re still publishing every month. But for the long-term survival of the *Beacon*, we haven’t done well enough.

- We need more people writing, editing, and taking pictures in order to make our coverage of all things Andover better and better.
- We need more people involved in the design and layout of each issue. Not having those volunteers means I have to work 60 or 70 hours a week for the last two weeks of every month to get the paper ready for the printer. With no one to help or to back me up, that means Andover is only one slip-and-fall or one bad bout of the flu from having no *Beacon* in a given month. As a community project, the design and layout of the newspaper isn’t working. Long-term, that problem has to be fixed.
- We need more help in managing the flood of e-mail, phone calls, and documents that precedes each issue of the *Beacon*. Just keeping track of 300 or more articles, photos, and ads is a big undertaking, most of which I organize and track myself. This is another problem that, long-term, must get fixed.

The third leg that the *Beacon* stands upon – finances – is in good shape. The local business community has recognized the quality of the *Beacon* and has supported us with advertising. As our sales team has brought in more advertisers, we have been able to increase the size of the paper from 24 pages in October, 2004 to 52 pages in October, 2008.

The *Beacon* still relies for a significant portion of its annual budget on voluntary donations from Andover residents. The paper is delivered at no charge to every mailing address in Andover – about 1,100 of them – but to date less than 300 of those households have made a donation to support the *Beacon* this year. That’s an area in which we could do better.

The Next 50 Issues

The *Beacon* has to do three things right in order to survive over the long
See 50th Issue on page 5

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