

AlaPressa

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA PRESS ASSOCIATION

APRIL 2025

Online Media Campus Upcoming Webinars

[Engaging for Democracy: How
Newsrooms Bolster Coverage
Through Listening](#)
May 8, 2025, 1 p.m.

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APA Summer Convention

Perdido Beach Resort
Orange Beach, AL
June 27-29, 2025

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accommodations at PBR.](#)

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All contests are
out for judging with
the Michigan Press
Association

ANAS sponsoring room night for the 2025 APA Summer Convention

Foundation board gets a boost from their visit with
Auburn University students

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ad tech monopoly

USPS moves forward with July rate increase

Why supporting local newspapers is crucial in age
of AI

When brand loyalty isn't on your side

Producing relevant content requires knowing your
community



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ANAS sponsoring room night for the 2025 APA Summer Covention

APA will return to the white sandy beaches of the Alabama Gulf Coast at the Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach, June 26-28.

For APA member newspapers and magazines, if you are staying more than one night at the Perdido Beach Resort for the convention, ANAS, the advertising placement arm of APA, will pay for your second night. Watch for more information on this extraordinary opportunity.

The hotel reservation deadline is Monday, May 26, 2025. Make your hotel reservations [HERE](#) or call 251-981-9811. *Reference booking ID#18440 for the APA block at special rates starting at \$329 per night (regular rates are \$600+ per night).

Please do not wait to reserve your room. The hotel is fully booked and will fill the remaining rooms in our block the day of the deadline.



Here's the lineup:

• **Thursday welcome event:**

Join us Thursday evening as we kick-off the weekend with a two-hour sunset dolphin cruise aboard Wild Hearts, a 53-foot, open ocean catamaran. We will depart from the dock across the street from the hotel. Tickets are \$50. Price

includes light food, beer, wine, soft drinks and water. Space is limited, so reserve your seat early.

• **Friday afternoon programs and events:**

We are excited to have Rob Curley, executive editor of the Spokesman-Review in Spokane, Wash., join us for two programs. He will talk about audience engagement and community funding, among other topics.

The second Friday afternoon program is Barrister and Brews. APA attorney Evans Bailey will be available to answer your legal questions about open meetings and open records issues.

End the day with fellowship and libations at our opening reception on the beach deck. Dinner on your own.

• **Saturday programs and events:**

In our breakfast program, we will hear about America's 250, the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

We will hear another program from Rob Curley, and also a legislative panel featuring some of the top leaders in the Alabama Legislature.

We have invited Sen. Katie Britt to be our luncheon speaker.

Finally, we will celebrate the winners of the 2025 APA Media Awards with a reception and banquet Saturday night. Let's celebrate all of the good work accomplished this year!

Visit alabamapress.org/summer to register with APA. Please contact Jaclyn at the APA office if you have any questions.

The hotel deadline is Monday, May 26, 2025. Make your hotel reservations [HERE](#) or call 251-981-9811.

We look forward to seeing you in Orange Beach!

Foundation board gets a boost from their visit with Auburn University students

APA Journalism Foundation board of directors met recently on the campus of Auburn University, with more students participating than ever.



Dr. Justin Blankenship, associate director of journalism, welcomed members to the Auburn campus. Foundation President Anthony Campbell, editor and general manager of The Advertiser/Glean in Guntersville, led the meeting.

The group attended a Sports Reporting class, visited the student newspaper, The Auburn Plainsman, and joined the Reporting Issues of Social Change class.

After the business meeting, the board enjoyed lunch with students and faculty. Board members commented they felt a renewed sense of excitement for our industry after meeting with the students.

The Tuskegee News changes ownership

From The Tuskegee News

After 42 years, the ownership of The Tuskegee News is changing hands. Gayle Davis, the owner, who along with her late husband, Paul Davis, successfully shepherded the award-winning weekly paper since 1983.

The new owners are a familiar group to Macon County citizens. Tuskegee Media, LLC is the new owner and is an entity formed by the Macon County Economic Development Authority (MCEDA).

Some months ago, when the Economic Development Authority learned that Gayle Davis was retiring permanently and had not found a buyer for the paper, the fear and reality became that the 160-year-old newspaper could close its doors.

Formal discussions began late last year and in December, the MCEDA board voted to purchase the paper. Tuskegee Media, LLC was formed, and a new reporter was hired.

Michael Floyd is the new journalist for The Tuskegee News. He is a recent graduate of Auburn University in the School of Journalism and has Tuskegee ties and roots.

He was a reporter for the award-winning Auburn Plainsman student newspaper for several years. He is a native of Brewton and learned journalism at a young age covering sports for the Brewton Standard newspaper.

Michael is completing obligations as a teacher with the Auburn City School

system and is training part-time with The Tuskegee News until coming on board full-time.

The Tuskegee News' Publisher and Editor Guy Rhodes (a recipient of the Distinguished Alabama Community Journalist Award from the Auburn University Journalism Foundation and a multi-time winner for column writing from the Alabama Press Association) has served as editor of the The Tuskegee News for 31 years — and for 20 years as its publisher and editor.

Guy is one of Alabama's outstanding journalists in the past 50 years. He will stay on full-time in the near future to help their growing team learn how to get the stories and the news out each week, noted Joe Turnham, executive director of MCEDA. After that he will contribute in a consultant/advisor role.

Scott Richardson, another member of the Davis' family, will continue handling some financial duties, as well as delivering newspapers. He has been with The Tuskegee News for 21 years.

Gayle Davis said, "she felt great relief that such a reputable organization like MCEDA would take the paper over." For every week for the past 42 years, the Davis family has assured the community that its news and happenings could be found in The Tuskegee News.

The Tuskegee News has won over 60 Alabama Press Association awards, including 31 in the last eight years. The

MCEDA salutes the Davis family and Guy Rhodes for their incredible professionalism and service to Macon County for these many years.

The Tuskegee News serves as the "paper-of-record" for Macon County and is the official repository for legal notices, voter list publication, tax records and probate. Having lost the only newspaper in Macon County would have caused severe problems for the community.

Mark Ennis, Chairman of MCEDA, said board members immediately recognized the need to keep the paper in good hands and assure citizens of excellence in reporting and recording community events. Also, maintaining the local "paper-of-record" was essential for us to have a successful community.

"Our board is made up of appointees from all four municipalities, the county commission, the university and our legislative delegation. Therefore, we feel like our ownership of the paper assures that all parts of the community will be represented by the paper," Ennis noted.

"Also, the fact that our own MCEDA director, Joe Turnham, has been a contributing writer and occasional reporter to The Tuskegee News for over six years gave us comfort that Joe knew the operations of the paper and people in the community. Joe will continue to write for the paper and take a role in its management," Ennis concluded.

People

Mooty returns to Alabama

Kyle Mooty, former editor of the Enterprise Ledger and the Eufaula Tribune, has been named editor at Deep South Media Group. The group includes The South Alabamian in Jackson, The Clarke County Democrat in Grove Hill and The Thomasville Times. He returns to Alabama after three years as editor of the Lockhart (Texas) Post-Register.

Mooty began his career in 1980 at the Northwest Arkansas Times. He has also worked at papers in Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Georgia, Missouri and Texas.

Casillas promoted at Carpenter Media

Heather Casillas, group advertising director for The Cullman Times, The Athens News-Courier and the St. Clair News-Aegis, has been promoted to general manager. She will continue in her advertising role in addition to her role as general manager.

Casillas is a native of Limestone

County, and began working at The News-Courier more than 25 years ago as a clerk in the advertising department.

McCarn selected for Starnes Media Creator Collective

Leyton McCarn was among the high school students selected to join the Starnes Media Creator Collective, an elite journalism and media mentorship program designed to provide real-world storytelling experience to high school students in the Birmingham area.

McCarn is a sophomore at Spain Park High School and is the daughter of APA Member Services Coordinator Jaclyn Langan.

Starnes Media publishes hyperlocal products in the Birmingham area. Tim Stephens, general manager of Starnes Media and executive director of the Creator Collective, said "This initiative is personal to me. I've seen firsthand how mentorship opportunities like this can

change the trajectory of a young person's life, instilling confidence, developing critical skills and inspiring creativity. The Creator Collective will help students discover their passion for storytelling while producing work that resonates with their communities."

The students will create monthly content for Starnes Media, covering prom, graduation and spring sports in both print and digital formats. The group will also collaborate on producing a mini-documentary chronicling the experiences of the inaugural class of the Creator Collective.

An advisory board comprising industry professionals, educators and community leaders will provide strategic guidance and support to ensure the program aligns with industry standards and educational goals. The board will also assist in resource mobilization and community outreach, contributing to the program's success and sustainability.

Industry

News/Media Alliance hails court ruling on Google ad tech

From News/Media Alliance

Judge Leonie Brinkema of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia recently ruled that Google had acted illegally to maintain a monopoly in advertising technology. This monopoly has allowed the company to force news and content publishers to use its services, and offer them lower payouts for ad space than they would otherwise receive in a competitive market.

In response to this ruling, Danielle Coffey, president and CEO of the News/Media Alliance, issued the following statement:

"The news media industry hails the court's decision to again hold Google accountable for decades of abuse of its market power. Google's monopolistic tactics—this time in the advertising market—have starved content creators of the revenues they deserve and need to sustain quality journalism. Today is a big day for our industry."

The News/Media Alliance has spent years advocating on behalf of news media

publishers against Google's unlawfully anticompetitive actions. We are strongly supportive of a similar lawsuit in Texas that will follow, as well as the Gannett lawsuit currently being litigated on the same issues. Much of this was prompted in the House Report that documented Google's abuse in the ad tech ecosystem, the scope of which is wide-reaching.



The Alliance has repeatedly highlighted the extensive harm Google's anti-competitive actions have caused to both publishers and consumers. The Alliance has offered countless testimony on this issue, laying out the damage Google's monopoly has caused publishers of all

sizes, noting a particularly disproportionate impact on minority media.

The decision, when coupled with Google's dominance in search recently affirmed by the courts in a separate case, illustrates the stranglehold Google has on consumer data and advertising that has led to devastating revenue loss for creators of original, quality content. The Alliance weighed in on the other Google antitrust case by submitting a whitepaper, "How Google Abuses Its Position as a Market Dominant Platform to Strong-Arm News Publishers and Hurt Journalism," to the court for review.

Fixing this problem was always the premise of the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act, which would address the marketplace imbalance that has had a devastating impact on news media's ability to reinvest in quality journalism. We will continue to work with our legislative champions, Senators Kennedy and Klobuchar, to find a path forward for this desperately-needed legislative solution.

USPS moves forward with July rate increase

From National Newspaper Association

The USPS announced recently it is filing for a large postage rate increase to be implemented on July 13, 2025. Rates for Periodicals are proposed to increase on average by 9.3%.



This action comes after the removal of Postmaster General Louis DeJoy and before the Board of Governors has named his successor. NNA along with the entire mailing industry has called for

the USPS Board of Governors to pause implementation of the 'Delivering for America' Plan, especially with regard to the large rate increase that has been under development. Over the last month, thousands of messages to the Chair of the Board of Governors and leaders of the House and Senate oversight committees calling for a pause have been sent.

"This action is extremely disturbing," NNA Chair Martha Diaz-Askenazy, publisher of the San Fernando (Calif.) Valley Sun, said. "Punitive rate increases have been counter-productive, only serving to destroy mail volume. Huge

losses have continued to mount. The USPS should not make major decisions without new leadership confirmed.

"The 'Delivering for America' plan has clearly failed," she said. "It should be set aside, and the USPS should engage with customers to chart a new positive course."

The decision comes with five vacancies on the USPS Board of Governors following the resignation of Robert Duncan. NNA believes decisions of this magnitude should not be taken until the Board of Governors is at full strength and new leadership has been installed.

Columns

When brand loyalty isn't on your side



*Ad-libs
by John Foust*

My grandmother Martha lived in Wilson, which is in eastern North Carolina. As a widow, she remarried later in life to a widower named Herman. I was in my

twenties then, and it was a special privilege to see those sweet lovebirds spend their final years together.

A few years after they married, they moved to a retirement community in Durham, about 30 minutes away from Raleigh, where I was living.

Being so close, I visited them as often as I could.

I remember calling before one visit to

ask if there was anything they needed.

Herman said he needed a can of Barbasol shaving cream from a particular drug store in Wilson. I was happy to do that and, although I mentioned that Barbasol was sold everywhere, he insisted that it had to come from that favorite drugstore. I ended up buying the shaving cream in Raleigh and took it to

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Columns

brands

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him, never letting on that it came from a different store. Everything worked out fine.

Brand loyalty is a powerful force. For years, Herman was loyal to Barbasol shaving cream and that drug store. He wasn't unpleasant about it at all; that was simply his choice. Like Herman, we all have loyalties to specific brands. Some of us wouldn't think of driving anything but a Toyota. Some always have Cheerios in their kitchen cabinet. And others will drive past two grocery stores to get to the store they like best.

Branding is a big topic that has inspired countless books, articles, seminars and lectures. But for our purposes today, let's narrow it down to one ques-

tion: How can you deal with an advertiser who doesn't consider your newspaper, because of a strong loyalty to another advertising choice?

Franklin, who has been a sales manager for many years, told me about his team's approach. "We acknowledge that loyalty runs deep in the advertising industry. We have plenty of advertisers who are loyal to us, so we understand how some people are loyal to others. Maybe a business has had good results running ads somewhere else. Maybe they have a long-term relationship with the other ad department. Or maybe it's a comfortable habit or a resistance to the perceived difficulty of setting a new course.

"When we hit that brick wall with a potential advertiser, we do two things," Franklin explained. "First, we develop a

plan to stay in touch. We don't become a pest, we just reach out to them every now and then to keep ourselves top-of-mind. We might send information about a relevant special section or even an interesting article about their favorite team.

"The second thing is to watch carefully for signs of change in their business, because change may indicate a willingness to consider new ideas. Is there new ownership or management? Is there a new ad manager? Are they planning to open a new home office or store location? Big or small, a hint of change may open the door for a sales appointment."

John Foust has conducted training programs for thousands of newspaper advertising professionals. He can be reached at john@johnfoust.com.

Why supporting local newspapers is crucial in age of AI



by Tippy Hunter,
Tallapoosa
Publishers Inc.

Artificial intelligence is making its mark, and fortunately (or unfortunately), it's here to stay.

What we considered science fiction in the 1980s is no longer fiction. It was 1982 when KITT gave us our first glimpse with his talk-responsive screen disguised as a black Trans Am.

In 1987, RoboCop introduced us to the good versus bad of AI and the ethics associated with it. The good AI being the creation of streamlined processes that lead to more efficiency, and the lack of human emotion from an AI-generated robot that allowed for greater objectivity. The bad AI being the dangers of unchecked artificial intelligence, which brings up the ethics of it all.

Is it ethical to develop machines with humanlike capabilities that lack humaneness? Is it ethical to forgo human oversight by putting our trust strictly in AI?

I ride the fence on AI's place in our lives. The social media capabilities, design options, location and navigation services, chat features, facial recognition and personalized recommendations are gamechangers. I'm sure I'm not alone in saying there are a lot of AI components I hope we never have to live without.

When it comes to news, and local news-

papers especially, AI is a big NO for me. Recently, AI-generated newsletters have popped up in 47 states. These newsletters were created by an individual who uses AI to curate local news content lifted directly from trusted community newspapers without permission and without paying journalists for their work. The sites for these newsletters are strategically designed to look like local sources, but in reality, it is merely AI scraping websites and extracting (stealing) content.

According to a recent Trust in Media study, local newspapers are America's most trusted source of news. Local newspapers outperformed national papers, television and social media on every trust measure.

Eighty percent of Americans believe it is critically important to have a local newspaper, and nearly three out of four say their community would suffer without one. According to the study, readers consistently cite local newspapers as more transparent, more ethical and more invested in their communities. I couldn't have said the last sentence better myself.

Readers rely on local newspapers because we deliver facts and accountability. We didn't generate trust by an algorithm. Our journalists earned it by reporting from the frontlines on the stories that matter most, and they know because they live,

shop and work in our communities.

When AI steals community news, it affects not only your local newspaper but it affects you as well. Why buy a subscription to your local newspaper if AI is going to steal the content and serve it up for you? This directly affects employees' salaries at your local news source, and the community risks losing critical coverage.

If we were to reduce staff and, could no longer cover local news, AI would have no content to scrape. These bots are not going to come to the Benjamin Russell football game and run up and down the field for four quarters or show up at the next Tallassee school board meeting. At the worst point, our communities become a news desert which leads to the spread of misinformation, loss of trust, reduced accountability and, in some cases, increased isolation and corruption.

There's a lot at stake in the battle with AI. It's not just your community's news.

It's your community. It's your livelihood, and it's your trust. The best way to protect your local newspaper is to support it. Subscribe to it. Advertise to its enormous audience. And back the business that we do for you on a daily basis. If you're not already a subscriber, I'm asking that you please consider joining our club of knowledge and accountability-driven journalists who show up every day for our readers.



Stealing is un-American. Tell Washington to make Big Tech pay for the content it takes. NEWS MEDIA ALLIANCE

Please use print and digital house ads APA sent out from News/Media Alliance that are posted on BamaNet throughout April and whenever else you like.

Columns

Producing relevant content requires knowing your community



by Jim
Pumarlo

Editors are regularly challenged: What mix of stories and photos will collectively make this edition a “must see” for readers and advertisers? There is no universal formula.

The first step in any market, however, is to know your community. Fundamental to providing pertinent coverage is living in the neighborhoods where your readers work and play.

That’s common sense for newspapers to truly have a pulse of their markets. Yet, as simplistic as it sounds, it’s distressing to see newsrooms relying more and more on remote reporting, and to see staff living miles away from the communities they are charged with chronicling everyday happenings.

I was fortunate to guide a staff when community newspapers were flourishing. As a bonus, the hometown owners recognized the value of and dedicated extra resources to the news product. The landscape admittedly is far different today. Newspapers are no longer the primary avenue to deliver news and spread advertising messages.

Shortcuts in gathering news have become standard, almost essential. Reporters record meetings from online viewing, only occasionally attending in person. Press releases are accepted with minimal follow-up, often printed verbatim with PR language suited for internal newsletters.

I don’t minimize the challenges of the changing landscape. Maintaining commu-

nity connections is hard work these days – especially with diminished resources, but building relationships still is critical to generating relevant content.

Making first impressions is important, especially if a newspaper changes ownership. Consider these messages:

- A flagship newspaper that served a community for more than 150 years pulls up its roots – doesn’t even have a storefront office – and moves its chain headquarters 25 miles away. A business out of sight is soon out of mind.



- A new reporter writes an introductory column expressing her desire to learn about and become a part of the local community. In the same space, she tells readers she lives 40 miles away in the big city where she has a part-time job and on weekends enjoys exploring the metropolitan area with family and friends.

- An editor comes on board, writes that he looks forward to living in the community and meeting people. A year later, he has yet to introduce himself – in written communication or in person – to local governing bodies and likely to other key newsmakers.

Connecting with community is paramount to producing substantive stories. Even more important, everyday contact

is at the core of building confidence with readers. The point is underscored by Trusting News, a research and training project that empowers journalists to demonstrate credibility and earn trust.

Trusting News offers a Trust Kit with a goal to help newspapers:

- Ask for community input in productive ways.
- Identify and refine knowledge around local community members’ perceptions of local news.
- Communicate more regularly with people who have low trust in news and address their frustrations.
- Act on feedback to improve your overall coverage.

The kit forwards several ideas for engaging with community and then acting on feedback. The common thread? It’s far easier, and more meaningful, to execute the strategies if you are a part of community.

It’s easy to become overwhelmed when launching a major initiative, so I advise taking baby steps. Here’s one suggestion from the Trust Kit: Have each journalist in your newsroom commit to interviewing one person a month who has low trust in news. One question to ask: What do journalists often get wrong about you or about things in your life?

In similar vein, map a plan for reporters to connect monthly with one person not in their regular network. Meet face-to-face. You’ll expand your knowledge of the community and gain one more source to forward story ideas to enrich your content while deepening community connections.

Jim Pumarlo writes, speaks and provides training on community newsroom success strategies. He can be reached at www.pumarlo.com and at jim@pumarlo.com.

Help Wanted

Reporter - Huntsville, AL

If you care about, and want to help others clearly understand, what’s going on in your community and how it will affect the people who live and work there, Alabama Media Group and its daily digital news products may be perfect for you. The base salary range is \$42,000 to \$48,000 per year. The reporter will be responsible for daily, audience-focused reporting on Huntsville, Alabama, the state’s largest city and a technology, aerospace and manufacturing center.

[CLICK HERE](#) to learn more about this position and to apply.

Additional Open Positions on APA Help Wanted page:

Managing News/Sports Editor - South Alabama

Page Designers - South Alabama

Magazine Feature Writer - Alexander City, AL



For more information on these positions and to see the latest listings [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the APA Help Wanted page.