

We can hope for more opportunities for the Hmong community to present their thoughts, their ambitions, and their voices to shine a light on all the possibilities this community has to offer. †

Small Newspaper in Rural Oregon Thrives

BY BAILEY PARENTEAU

IN TODAY'S MODERN INDUSTRY, many newspaper companies, large and small, are struggling to make ends meet. With technology at our fingertips, physical newspapers have become irrelevant to some. However, one small newspaper in rural Oregon is defying the industry trends.

Circulation at the Malheur Enterprise has increased dramatically over the past few years. The paper has even won, notably, several national awards. In the tiny eastern Oregon town of Vale, with population of 1,900, one small newspaper is standing out in a big way.

Seventy-four-year-old Sheila Schroder has worked for Malheur Enterprise for over twenty years. "That's when I had a grocery cart and I delivered papers with my grocery cart full of papers," Schroder says in an interview with NPR. "People called me 'Bag Lady,'" she adds with a laugh. Every Wednesday for delivery days, she packs her Dodge Ram pick-up truck full of newspapers. Her stops include the courthouse, a nursing home, and the local flower shop. However, her entire route takes her over 100 miles throughout the entirety of Malheur county, Oregon's second largest. This expanded delivery zone has, without a doubt, been one of the effects from the past three years of business' boom.

Okay, "booming" is a relative term when it comes to this weekly paper. Paid subscriptions for the paper are at 2,000. What's most surprising is that during a recent week, more than a third of Malheur County's 30,000-or-so residents read the paper's online edition.

Additionally, advertisements, the primary source of income for the newspaper, are way up. The paper's editor and publisher, Les Zaitz, has been largely responsible for up-swing success of the newspaper. "Our overall revenue is more than triple what it was three years ago. Circulation is probably double. We're profitable, and there are not a lot of papers in the United States that can say they're profitable."

Perhaps one of the newspapers biggest successes is owed to Zaitz, who was a longtime, award-winning investigative reporter for The Oregonian, the state's largest newspaper. But, Zaitz always had a passion for small-town papers. So, he tabled his plans for retirement in 2015 and bought the Enterprise with family members.

The paper, at the time, was almost out of business. It was filled with gossip and press releases. "It wasn't delivering much in the way of real local news," Zaitz says, adding, "There was just no doubt in my mind that if we turned around the news product, and got a salesperson in, we could make the thing profitable pretty quick."

With a new spring in their step and a "booming" newspaper staff of three, the paper won a prestigious national Investigative Reporters and Editors award and the IRE Freedom of Information award. "For a remote rural weekly to achieve that kind of journalistic attention," Zaitz says, "boy, your chest comes out a little farther. There's a little spring in your step the staff is really proud of."

He knows there's an appetite for good reporting. Zaitz has earned his readers' trust with his devotion to base principles of journalism. Even when the Enterprise has angered local politicians, Zaitz has remained true to the purpose of journalism: to be accurate and to be fair. †



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