LAW ENFORCEMENT, MEDIA AND THE COMMUNITY IN AN
APPALACHIAN COUNTY

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Introduction

This endeavor stemmed from my desire to journalistically document a region that often goes uncovered by mainstream media: Appalachian Ohio. When stories from this region do attain coverage, the journalists assigned to write about Appalachian Ohio are typically nonnative to the area and generally unfamiliar with culture and circumstances surrounding the lifestyle. As a result, these journalists may produce content that can perpetuate negative stereotypes and further damage an economically disadvantaged and disenfranchised population. As a nonresident of Ohio, I initially sought to better understand this population, and in turn, effectively report on the issues facing the community. At the onset of this project, I chose Meigs County as my locality. What I found was a county almost completely devoid of media sunshine.

Whether because of the Southeast Ohio county’s removed location or its low-density population, its residents reported to me – both in interviews and polite conversation – that they feel they have lost their voice in the Ohio Statehouse to louder, crowded urban counties. But perhaps this lack of voice in the state government might be correlated with the gradual dissolution of the county’s own local newspapers. Meigs has an in-county newspaper – the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel – but even within this publication, local and regional news coverage is limited. Given the news media’s responsibility – and cause for existence – is to keep public officials in check and highlight what needs to be improved in a community, the scarcity of oversight is troubling. This lack of watchdog reporting became the core of my project, and my
goal was to explore and explain it to the best of my capabilities. In addition to demonstrating the issues in media coverage, I wanted to portray this region’s population and culture in an ethical, nonbiased way that clearly relates the need for investigative and accountability journalism. Although I realize my reporting might not function as the solution to some of the issues affecting Meigs County or Appalachian Ohio in general, I hope that my published stories will encourage some to wonder what stories go untold when profit-making becomes priority to true journalism.

**Literature Review**

When taking a longitudinal approach to a sensitive topic, journalists must draw on the foundations of good reporting and ethical standards to both create the most authentic portrait of the topic and minimize harm to the people being interviewed. To report about the relationship between law enforcement, the media and residents of Meigs County, in which I am not a resident, I must exercise best journalistic practices in crime and police reporting and community reporting. This literature review examines the characteristics and ethical practices of crime reporting and community journalism and explores where those concepts may intersect.

*Covering criminal justice and those who enforce it*

Accounts of crime events and their resolution is a staple of American journalism; one would be hard-pressed to find a local or metro newsroom today that does not task at least one reporter with monitoring a police scanner and following up
on arrest reports. The process of transforming a criminal incident into a news story is completely performed by reporters and editors who must regularly make choices as to what events are newsworthy (Lotz, 1991, p. 114).

When an editor sends a reporter to collect details from the scene of a crime, the reporter is likely to arrive at the end of the incident or as law enforcement officers begin their investigation. Because of this timing, reporters are in the responding position and must rely on first-person witnesses to recount the event, rather than experiencing it first-hand (Lotz, 1991, p. 58). In these situations, Lotz (1991) contends that reporters for all mediums generally rely upon the official sources, such as the officers on the scene or a public information officer for the responding agency (p. 59). In turn, those officers who give information may be biased toward one distinct interpretation of an event (Chermak, 1995, p. 123). Though newspaper reporters tend to gather more sources than television reporters given their production needs, both media rely upon criminal justice-related sources for the official comment and first-hand accounts from those directly involved in the incident to add color to a story. Reporters from either medium will seldom consult experts, witnesses, politicians, educators or church officials when covering crime events (Chermak, 1995, p. 123). Media professionals, especially television reporters, interview citizens who appear at the scene of a crime, often as a last resort when law enforcement officials will not engage (Chermak, 1995, p. 123). Lotz (1991) identifies six issues that emerge when relying solely on responding officers:
• The officer on the scene compiles information after receiving a call from a dispatcher and then talking to sources on the scene (p. 60). Reporters receive information that has been passed through several interpretative lenses, and therefore they lose some of the objective autonomy that reporters prefer to seek when investigating a story.

• Law enforcement sources – including public information officers – are not trained in journalistic practices, so they are not informed as to what information a reporter might seek regarding an incident and how quickly they need that information (p. 60). This could lead to tensions between reporters working on deadline and officers.

• Law enforcement officers have no obligation to alert reporters about evidence they find throughout an investigation or any changes in their protocol and offices (p. 60). According to Ohio Revised Code, “confidential law enforcement investigatory records,” a vague and broad description, are exempt from open record requests.

• In instances of law enforcement officers’ mistakes, neglect or abuse of a victim or investigation, the agency may try to maintain control of information about those incidents (p. 60-61).

• Law enforcement officers generally do not take the historical context of a crime, offender or victim into account, so a reporter would have to find relevant contextual information through other means (p. 61).
Law enforcement officers do not respond to all crimes in the same manner; for example, violent crimes or robberies are more likely to be discovered, solved and taken care of quickly by officers, compared to financial or white-collar crimes (p. 61). This could lead to reporters inadvertently applying an agency’s bias of discovery and capture of the crime, rather than understanding the crime’s actual prevalence.

When reporters build reliance upon official sources, they often exclude important individuals who could inform their stories in a way police cannot. For example, reporters often decline to interview the alleged criminal or accused person. Lotz (1991) argues this is generally because the accused’s perspective does not fall into conventional ideas of morality, and understanding their perspective would require reporters to spend more time with the allegedly deviating individual or on the news story in general (p. 84-85). To correct such exemptions, Lotz suggests reporters take longitudinal approach to reporting crime by focusing on the prevalence, cause and impact of a type of crime rather than covering individual incidents in a brief manner. Lotz (1991, p. 116) cites as example an analysis of domestic violence and bride-burning within arranged marriages in India, writing: “This Wall Street Journal article focuses on a type of crime instead of an isolated incident, thus allowing the reporter to seek expert opinion (not that of a patrolman on scene) and to explore wider issues such as India’s economy and culture… The article gives no simple answers to greed and insanity. It goes much deeper. If other papers covered crime as well as the Wall Street Journal in this instance, the improvement would be dramatic.”
Interviewing those outside the department

Nonofficial voices do appear in stories that involve law enforcement officers. Lawrence’s (1996) study of The Los Angeles Times’ reports before and after the 1991 attack on Rodney King and resulting riots illustrates this use of nonofficial voices. Her analysis of the paper’s coverage suggests that the beating and riots stimulated an increase in coverage that employed “challenging frames,” or considered the societal structures that could precipitate excessive use of force by police (Lawrence, 1996, p. 441). However, Lawrence’s data appear to show a drop in the paper’s use of nonofficial voices throughout the year after the riots (1996, p. 442). This suggests that reporters tend to call upon nonofficial and structural looks at law enforcement only after an extraordinary incident, but normal practices – such as indexing, or referring to official sources for information – resume as attention to the initial incident fades.

Chermak (1995) noticed a similar dynamic in both newspapers and television coverage of an investigation procedure in which media interview victims of a crime to report upon possible abuse or neglect by law enforcement agencies. Despite such cases, reporters still rely upon law enforcement most often as their primary source in reporting events of a crime (1995, p. 100).

The voices of crime victims, often cited by media critics as a method to draw on audiences’ emotions, can modify the newsworthiness of a story based on both their characteristics and the way these sources respond to reporters. Certain traits in victims, such as younger, elderly or well-known individuals, often lead a reporter choose to
cover their situation over other crimes that appear in the police blotter (Chermak, 1995, p. 86).

Another influencing factor is a source’s cooperation in interviews. Generally, reporters will cease interview requests if victims and their families refuse to talk, and the story will thereby lose importance to the news organization (Chermak, 1995, p. 87). In contrast, sources with eloquent, emotional pleas can turn a small story about drug paraphernalia and litter into an impassioned four-minute clip (Chermak, 1995, p. 94). In written stories, a cooperative source with exciting or accusatory quotes can move a story to a prominent position on the website or broadsheet, and even allow reporters to go “off the record” or use pseudonyms in reporting. If victims and witnesses can identify reporters’ needs, they may cooperate with the media in exchange for promotion of their personal agenda, Chermak says. A mother of a murdered woman acknowledged that media exploited her story, but she cooperated in order to possibly hear more information about her missing daughter. Once her daughter’s body was found, she continued the relationship with media in order to put pressure on police to continue the investigation and to prevent other women from becoming victims as well (Chermak, 1995, p. 106).

**Crime narratives in reporting**

Relatedly, a reporter’s event-driven approach to coverage of police activity can be damaging to readers’ perceptions. Over a 21-year span, Silverman (2012) found that officers have a “golden hour” in which they can distribute their press releases and
attempt to influence the media. For example, Silverman’s study of British media and law enforcement cites reports of the death of Ian Tomlinson during the 2009 G20 Summit protests in London. The initial police reports mentioned that bottle-like objects were tossed at responding officers, which news agencies highlighted in their coverage. Only after citizens’ videos appeared on YouTube did the media change its frame accordingly (Silverman, 2012, p. 116-118).

But even when news organizations use an event-driven story to launch an investigation of institutional abuse of power, a clear picture does not always emerge. Pollack and Allern (2014) examined this trend in a content analysis of an instance of police brutality against Eugene Ejike Obiora, an individual of African origin, in Trondheim, Norway. The four news organizations analyzed by the researchers specifically covered the events surrounding the death of Obiora and the officers responsible, rather than taking a longitudinal look at the delay and eventual results of an investigation by the Norwegian Bureau for the Investigation of Police Affairs. As a result, the coverage is “one-sided,” focusing on the actions of “rotten apples” in the department rather than researching the organizational structure of Norwegian police departments and considering what kind of neglect or abuse of political power could allow such incidents (Pollack et al., 2014, p. 41, 49).

A reporter’s storytelling approach may also influence the effect left upon the audience. Although daily reporters often relay the information as a crime brief, some writers choose to report dramatic crimes in a longer, narrative fashion by using witness accounts to convey details. Reporters often assert that narrative accounts of
crime capture readers’ attention and make the story more significant for them, van Krieken, Hoeken & Sanders (2015) argue. Their study, which measured readers’ interest and engagement in reports of a shooting in a mall, compared a long-form narrative account to a long-form explainer piece and a news brief. Readers’ responses indicated that narrative articles drew more emotions, and readers said they identified and empathized with witnesses better through the narrative (van Krieken, 2015, p. 590). The researchers found that similar to short news reporters, narrative articles also held readers’ attention better than long-form news pieces, but short news reports also maintained an important role in keeping readers’ attention, according to van Krieken’s studies (2015, p. 591).

Accordingly, Brown (2003) writes that news organizations and other media outlets have financial motivation to describe crime-related news in a narrative fashion, and as such they assume the roles of both selling the frightening or shocking narratives, and lamenting any tragedies associated with those instances (p. 26). However, a narrative approach to crime and law enforcement coverage can present dangers to readers, as news consumers lose sight of what is reality and what is an experience fabricated for their information, or at its most sensational, their enjoyment (Brown, 2003, p. 22). Brown (2003) argues that reporters blur the distinction between conventional news reports and entertainment by choosing to cover the most dramatic or bias-confirming incidents (p. 30) or through using metaphors of “minimum verbiage, maximum impact” that relate crime reporting to individuals’ contexts of experience (p. 44). Brown (2003) acknowledges that metaphors do not inherently push
an event apart from reality, but asserts that relying solely upon metaphors can prevent readers from meeting the topic untainted by any media frames (p. 43).

In order to understand how individuals interpret crime narratives, one must consider the justice narrative and what it communicates. Justice narratives, especially when employed in entertainment media, unfold in a specific sequence: a crime is committed against an individual and then that person will seek some kind of retribution (Rothmund et al., 2013, p. 180). Rothmund et al. (2013) contend that reactions to this sequence vary depending on specific factors involved. Audiences are likely to support the morals of the characters in a justice narrative if they support the personality of that character (p. 182). An audience member may even attempt to provide help for those they believe an injustice is committed against. However, if audiences do not agree with a character’s personality, they are more likely to assign blame to the character in an unjust situation (Rothmund et al., 2013, p. 179).

Rothmund et al. (2013) argue that justice narratives are used in media for three purposes: to mobilize people against certain injustices, to entertain, and to construct and disseminate moral standards and norms (p. 170). While some believe that justice narratives overexpose audiences to violent behaviors that increase their likelihood of committing such injustices against others, Rothmund et al. argue that the interpretation lies in the framing. The narrative may impinge both moral standards and violent tendencies on audiences at the same time, or depending upon the context in which it was presented, it may change audiences’ interpretation of such norms (Rothmund et al., 2013 p. 185-186).
In some instances, media organizations have held some leverage over policymakers’ actions in regard to criminal justice. Silverman (2012) cites an example in which the *News of the World*, a British tabloid, threatened to release the locations of bail hostels in order to coerce police into taking more action against sex offenders in hostels. Although the number of sex offenders released from prison to bail hostels was not as large as it had been in the past, Silverman cites the issue was in the “signification spiral,” therefore the media waged a crusade against it (p. 35-36).

Conventions of crime reporting involving law enforcement in a small town or rural setting change to reflect the news organizations’ smaller circulation and close-knit population. For instance, Lauterer (2006) argues that community papers run risks when publishing names of the accused, possibly shocking or potentially harming members of the community by abruptly telling them that a member of the community is also a criminal (p. 259).

*Tenets behind reporting to a community*

Practicing community media is integral to geographic centers and communities of interest, no matter the size. Compared to commercial, mainstream media and public media, community media is often the only outlet that recognizes exploited populations such as racial and ethnic minorities, gender minorities and those living in poverty (Vincent, 2013, p. 316).

However, Lauterer (2006) asserts that community newspapers have a “conflicting” role in society. The newspapers must be advocates for the community.
This requires that reporters cover the small events that the community finds important, no matter how many times a reporter has covered the assignment. However, these reporters must also find and expose issues in the community, and raise awareness about problems, even if other community members fear what it might do to relationships among residents or perceptions from outside the community (Lauterer, 2006, p. 261). Accordingly, covering a small town or tight-knit community is a delicate, difficult task, and with every assignment, reporters must carefully consider how their coverage may impact the people residing in their circulation area.

Local-focused newspapers have specific geographic boundaries that define their content (Dickens, 2015, p. 97). This enduring hyperlocal focus in spite of national coverage’s attempt to break boundaries, “it is often audiences’ feelings of not being recognized in national news agendas that drives them to generate and consume news stories more locally,” (Dickens, 2015, p. 98). When national news does portray small or underrepresented communities, the members feel they are either criminalized, victimized or inaccurately portrayed, whereas larger communities, which receive more media sunshine, are better known to reporters (Dickens, 2015, p. 104). Community journalists become advocates for issues that impact their audiences and encourage community members to document and record what is news to them (Selvin, 2015, p. 28). At the same time, Hess et al. (2014) contend that local media has an important role as mediator of national and international news by bringing that information to the local level. National and global issues may not appear relevant to smaller audiences because they do not have geographic ties to the content. However, local media have
the power to demonstrate, through their reporting, the relevance of geographically-distant events on a smaller scale. This dissemination of global content also functions reciprocally, perhaps allowing the organizations and individuals who operate on a national or global scale to notice and highlight the local spin on an issue, such as when Ricky Gervais promoted a review in *The Warrnambool Standard*, a small newspaper from Australia (Hess et al., 2014, p. 128-129).

*Reporting from one’s hometown*

The journalists who report about a community are often members of the same community, which sometimes gives those reporters have established better relationships with sources that can offer exclusive information (Dickens et al., 2015, p. 108-109). In addition, reporters for community newspapers, by nature of their generally small pool of audience members, have more opportunity to interact with readers and correct misconceptions that readers may submit (Selvin, 2015, p. 31). Lauterer (2006) argues that community journalists can use the advantages of their membership in a community, but they are placed in a uniquely “conflicting” relationship with their sources and audience. Conflicts of interest, or instances where a journalist’s role outside the newsroom might bias their reporting on a subject or organization, can be amplified in a small community where there are only so many people involved in maintaining the town’s vitality (Lauterer, 2006, p. 261-262). However, reporters’ personal connections to a community also place extra weight on the need to write accurately and honestly, because reporters feel an obligation to the
people who are involved, their friends, families and acquaintances in their reporting jurisdictions. This compels reporters to think of their sources and audience members as individuals, rather than demographic groups, as major metro papers are prone to do (Lauterer, 2006, p. 262). Because of this dynamic, reporters must consider what the community needs to hear while respecting the personalities of the people, and editors must be certain and firm in every editorial decision they make over contentious content. “When it comes down to making tough ethical decisions,” Lauterer states, “The community newspaper editor better have a moral compass that is locked unswervingly on magnetic north, because his or her reasons concerning whether and how to publish will be tested and questioned with almost every issue that comes along and every issue of the paper that comes out,” (Lauterer, 2006, p. 259).

Many journalists traditionally attempt to evade any possible conflicts of interest so as to maintain neutrality and appear to report as objectively as possible. The decision to avoid conflict of interest might be the reporter’s own choice, but editorial policy often prevents or sometimes punishes reporters for engaging in conflicting situations. Smith (2003) compares editorial decisions for and against certain reporters’ actions: for example, Washington Post editors prohibited all reporters who participated in a pro-choice march from covering abortion-related topics, while an Atlanta Journal-Constitution editor allowed reporters to participate in a march led by a controversial leader because the editor supported the march’s message of atonement and responsibility. But even the Constitution’s editor placed a few restrictions on the reporter, disallowing him from making a speech or holding signs during the event
(Smith, 2003, p. 367). Even endorsing a charity as a reporter or a newspaper can raise concern or complaints, because communities generally have plenty of charities that are worthy of support (Smith, 2003, p. 370). However, acknowledging reporters’ other roles, relationships and interests can be beneficial to the coverage they produce, allowing them to become better acquainted with their communities. Journalists obviously form opinions, and those opinions inevitably influence the way a reporter writes, regardless of whether she acknowledges or masks her thoughts (Smith, 2003, p. 370, 374).

Regardless, conflicts and criticism of content are inevitable because reporters are so geographically close to both their sources and their readers; even if a community reporter does not know an alleged criminal they are writing about, that alleged criminal or their network can easily locate that reporter (Cross, 2011, p. 36). Without the anonymity of a major metro news outlet, reporters must be prepared to defend their editorial decisions as well as the tenets of journalism: reporting without bias or favor, taking stances on major issues, and allowing any and all opinions to be heard (Cross, 2011, p. 35). In small towns, reporters frequently serve multiple roles in the community, and reporting objectively, or the public’s view of a paper’s objectivity, can be compromised easily if a reporter is also participating in the village council or working on a large service project with the Rotary Club (Smith, 2003, p. 372). Community journalists must also maintain their public status in spite of websites such as Topix, which allow individuals to post anonymous content, issues and opinions they have. As geographic communities begin to fracture due to job loss and the
creation of the internet’s boundary-breaking communities, journalists have a new responsibility to find and promote the truth in a community in a manner that the geographic community members can access (Cross, 2011, p. 37).

*Smaller circulation, fewer resources*

Terry (2011) and others laud community journalism as essential to the people it serves, despite the major strain for those operating within community newsrooms. Small staffs, low paychecks, minimal resources, time away from families and reporters’ student loan debt were all cited as tensions that prevent community newsrooms and weekly papers from operating at their highest potential (Terry, 2011, p. 78). Terry (2011) notes that community journalism as it exists today is threatened by cost-cutting initiatives in the news industry and the evolving media consumption habits by audience members. If community news organizations do not adapt a new business model, they may continue to lose staff, resources and their ability to provide content to smaller circulation regions (Terry, 2011, p. 78-79). Community media’s strength lies in local focus as well, though some larger media companies try to diminish that geographic relevance in order to save money. Outsourcing copy editing, layout and production to distant locations can be harmful to local news credibility, as those who do not know a region or group may make mistakes that would be otherwise preventable (Hess et al., 2014, p. 128).
**Digital landscape for small news outlets**

Though the economy may look bleak for these smaller publications, Terry (2011) believes community news organizations will retain their importance, for they provide the horizontal, or specialized and niche, content to complement the vertical, or all-encompassing, coverage of major media organizations (p. 78). In order to exist in the digital realm, Abernathy (2014) maintains that community newspapers must stop treating their digital editions as a “stepchild” and acting as if a business model will magically emerge from larger newspaper corporations so that digital editions can support the cost of traditional print journalism (p. 59, 62). Larger newspaper corporations often cut costs of operation, sometimes by 50 percent, by laying off staff in the administrative and editorial section. Such corporations then pocket the money saved in cost-cutting initiatives aside (Abernathy, 2014, p. 61). Abernathy (2014) suggests newspapers divest from their daily printing operations and instead increase focus on the creation and aggregation of content – a newspaper’s editorial strong suit (p. 65). The audiences of community journalism are loyal to their newspapers, and their loyalty often expands across platforms, if not the digital edition alone; instead, it is often editors and publishers who cling to the format and business model that had functioned in the past (Abernathy, 2014, p. 59).

In the current media climate, the only barrier to competing in the news industry is audience loyalty, so community newspapers must acknowledge their audiences in their print, digital and cross-platform outlets and leverage those audiences’ loyalties to
retain relevance. Loyal customers will be willing to pay for quality content (Abernathy, 2014, p. 60, 66).

Community journalism has ample opportunity to expand its offerings through an online and mobile presence that is likely to engage more readers. The audience that accesses their news via the Internet is consistently growing. Online newspapers, with their near-limitless space, can lift voices that would often not be heard in traditional reporting by featuring local residents’ blogs, thereby engaging and encouraging more individuals to participate in the issues affecting their community (Gilligan, 2011 p. 65-66). In addition, online platforms and social media attract a wider audience, as former residents or tangentially-interested parties can easily access news or remain alert by following a paper on Twitter or Facebook (Gilligan, 2011 p. 66).

Community newspapers historically fill a civic role in the regions or communities they serve, reporting the stories that today’s public advocacy journalists attempt (Terry, 2011, p. 75-76). For journalism to reflect its intended purpose as the “fourth estate,” community journalism must exist in a robust, engaged format. In Vincent’s (2013) ethnographic study of POOR Magazine, the author examined a community media outlet that both reported upon poor, minority communities in San Francisco and taught its constituents how to engage in reporting by telling their own stories. As the researcher participated in the outlet’s journalism training program, Vincent observed participants learned to recognize, confront and dismantle both the stereotypes that frame them and the system that works against them (p. 319-321).
Though this study and the news outlet might seem exemplary in approach, it nonetheless demonstrates the value of audience engagement.

**Best practices for reporting crime and the community**

Accountability journalism and long-form projects need to be more prevalent in journalism, but these can be difficult for news organizations stuck in the cycle of reporting breaking news to accomplish (Downie, 2002, p. 55).

Investigative projects may have differing trajectories, but basic strategies include forming, explaining and factchecking a topic under investigation. Doug Frantz’s investigation of the IRS’s surprise decision to allow the Church of Scientology to be a tax-exempt religious organization began with a casual tip, and from there he used a variety of sources to learn more about the turbulent relationship between Scientology and the IRS. He was not able to determine explicitly why the director of the IRS made his decision, but he presented a culmination of facts that allowed readers to draw their own conclusions about Scientology’s questionable strategies for applying political and financial pressure (Downie, 2002, p. 33-40).

When reporting upon law enforcement and the people they serve, talking to victims of crimes is inevitable. Reporters consider interviews with victims one of the most difficult tasks in the field because it is unlikely that they can reference shared experiences (Chermak, 1995, p. 96). Chermak (1995) suggests tactics reporters can employ to make victims more comfortable with interviews or build trust for the reporters and news outlet. Reporters may use the “slow notebook ploy,” only taking
notes after developing a conversation with a source and making them feel more comfortable in the conversation. They may also build relationships with sources by either offering unknown information in exchange for the emotional details they seek, or by listening, taking notes and responding when readers complain about a possible story the news outlet hasn’t covered (Chermak, 1995, p. 101-102). Based on other reporters’ experiences, Chermak implies that reporters should leave victims and families alone when they refuse to talk. He asserts that reporters tend to agree with victims’ wishes, unless a story is “super primary,” or so newsworthy that news organizations battle each other for new angles or reporting approaches. In instances such as the discovery of Jeffrey Dahmer’s first victim, reporters tend to torment families by incessantly seeking their comment. In addition to departing from regular journalistic ethics, this type of behavior dissuades families that may have otherwise shared stories from talking at all (1995, p. 104-105).

The ideas behind civic journalism also serve journalists who report for a local audience, as Smith (2003) suggests (p. 379-380). Civic journalism attempts to address three common practices in journalism that advocacy-minded reporters attempt to correct: overreliance on experts such as public officials and law enforcement officers, a lack of trust for public institutions and the media instilled in the public from journalistic cynicism, and journalistic detachment and fear of becoming involved in the community reporters cover (Smith, 2003, p. 379-380).

Compassion can always accompany reporters, especially when they interview individuals who have experienced tragedies. Reporters can exercise discretion in
deciding who they interview and how they do so, because compassion is required to report humanistic stories that evoke powerful emotions, according to Smith (2003, p. 300). In an interview, a journalist’s goal is to convince sources to give their story or describe their opinions as candidly as possible. As journalists gain experience, they start to gauge when someone is unwilling to talk and when they can be convinced to respond to tough questions. Many journalists develop conversational tactics to make a source feel comfortable enough to talk, such as asking simple questions or by turning an interview into a conversation. However, Smith (2003) argues that reporters run the risk of deceiving their sources or framing the story contrary to what a source expected. In order to place minimal harm on a source, reporters should be as clear as possible in their intentions when working with private citizens. Some sources may believe that a reporter will frame a story in a specific way, so a reporter should also be clear in explaining that they will report the truth as they see it, rather than writing in a way that pleases the source (Smith, 2003, p. 301-303).

Whether they realize it or not, reporters form loyalties during the act of engaging strangers personally to share information or tell their stories. Ideally, journalists should exercise a reciprocal relationship with their sources, doing no harm and receiving no harm; however, ethical quandaries often arise from the treatment of sources. In such scenarios, journalists must identify and evaluate competing loyalties and then act in a way that promotes loyalties that cohere with the loyalties of the community (Patterson et al. 1998, p. 94-95). “What you choose to be loyal to should be capable of inspiring a similar loyalty in others who are both like and unlike you,”
Different kinds of loyalties arise in journalism – loyalty to the profession, loyalty to employment and loyalty to others – but journalists should prioritize two loyalties: loyalty to humanity and loyalty to the truth (Patterson et al., 1998, p. 97-98).

**Reflections**

I did not intend for my reporting project to transform into an exploration, and ultimately a critique, of the media landscape in an Appalachian county. In fact, my original proposal only briefly mentions the role of the media as an interlocutor between law enforcement and the public. But perhaps my literature review readings ingrained my mind; or maybe all journalists are inherently prone to navel-gazing, and as I sank deeper into the project and my journalism studies, the transition became inevitable. However, I reached a juncture in my research where I decided I could no longer ignore the news media’s role – or lack thereof – in Meigs County, so I immersed myself in its existing, ancillary media outlets.

I started monitoring Meigs County’s newspaper, the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel* to determine the major crime issues facing law enforcement and citizens. However, I quickly realized this approach was futile, as I found very little coverage of crime, law enforcement and the courts. Perhaps more strikingly, I found minimal content written by the paper’s in-house reporters. While scrolling through the *Sentinel’s* pages, (preserved on the Meigs County Library’s digital archives) I noticed that few of the articles had specific bylines, and several of the *Sentinel’s* stories had the distinct odor
of the press release. As a journalist, I cringe at the notion of repackaging a press release as news, let alone running it as is. My initial observations and impressions of the paper’s content motivated me to dig deeper into the paper’s editorial choices, and how those might impact readers.

*The Daily Sentinel’s content*

Early in my project, I determined it valuable to calculate what types of stories the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel* covers, even if that content does not involve law enforcement. Rather than solely rely on hearsay from reporters and the public, I decided to conduct a content analysis of the paper’s coverage. The *Sentinel’s* online archives end at a certain date, so I sought print archives. When I called the *Daily Sentinel’s* general office line, the woman on the phone told me the office did not keep print nor digital archives. This seemed strange to me; I remember my first-day tour at the *Racine Journal Times*, where I interned last summer. I was brought to the “morgue” in the basement, which methodically stored one copy of every single day of print. Chaos ensued if one paper went missing.

The woman on the *Daily Sentinel’s* phone line directed me to the public library in neighboring Gallia County. I spent at least 40 minutes scouring the microfilm before a Gallia County librarian called the Meigs County Library and ascertained the archived broadsheets were stored electronically in Pomeroy, not Gallipolis. Once I definitively found the newspaper’s archives, I constructed a content analysis for 14 days of the editorial content.
Despite its name, the *Daily Sentinel* prints five days a week, so I randomly selected fourteen days with as close to an even distribution of days as possible between Jan. 1, 2015 and June 30, 2015. I kept track of every article printed in each day of the print publication, and found that on average, the *Sentinel* printed fewer than one crime or law enforcement-related story per issue.

In addition, many of those law enforcement stories reflected one of my earlier concerns about the *Daily Sentinel*: press releases and informational blurbs released by law enforcement officials themselves seemed to be published verbatim. For example, a front-page story on Feb. 4, 2015 about Ohio State Highway Patrol’s pleas to those passing by stopped patrol cars read like a press release, and it’s likely that the newsroom staff only made some modifications. A *Daily Sentinel* reporter told me that reporters tend to clean up the official jargon, but they mostly rely on press releases for more information, she said. On a journalistic level, rewriting and running a press release prevents a reporter from thinking critically about the information it contains. Even a public service announcement can lead to larger questions: *Have there been any recent crashes or injuries prompting this brief? What kind of penalties should my readers be aware of? What forthcoming policy or law change is behind this email?*

When I worked a cops shift for the *Racine Journal Times*, we would use press releases to prompt law enforcement officers for a bigger story interview, but we would never run a press release, even if it was first edited.

One could blame the *Sentinel*’s reporters, or even empathize with their newsroom deadlines and lack of editorial oversight, but the issue is systemic. The
Sentinel’s reporters are under the thumb of a greater organization, even beyond the newspaper collective Civitas Media listed on its digital masthead. In this case, as in many others, the newspaper is actually owned by Versa Capital Management, a Philadelphia-based private equity firm tasked with buying out, reorganizing and liquidating failing companies.

Versa Capital Management may be the newspaperman’s nightmare: corporate America sucking the life out of small, locally-focused newspapers. Conventional wisdom holds that community newspapers survive the collapse of print. Small-town residents still crave their broadsheet with their breakfasts, and small-town politics still require their reporters’ discerning eyes. The content analysis I conducted – filled with press release rewrites, wire news stories and oversized advertisements – cut me deeply. On the surface, I have no stake in Meigs County, yet I still feel pain. I cannot imagine how it must feel to be a lifelong Meigs resident watching their region’s relevance and character fade even from the local paper’s coverage.

Instead of prioritizing hard news coverage, Sentinel’s reporters write features on community organizations and their accomplishments, recognizing their work and getting more faces and names into the paper. Although such coverage certainly cultivates local pride, reporters do their community a disservice when they only reach one side of the news spectrum, whether that is the good or bad. Press releases can be modified in 20 minutes, and some good features can be written in a day. What the Sentinel is missing is the search. Strong content takes time: reporters have to research online, make multiple calls, ask pointed questions, and consider the most effective
way to explain a topic before sitting down at their laptops to write. I fear the nature of a Versa newsroom, whether intended or not, does not allow for this kind of reporting, and it appears that journalism in Meigs County is one casualty.

**Requesting Records**

For the next step in the research process, I requested records of law enforcement logs to gain some insight into the types of calls that law enforcement officers receive during a given time period.

Navigating public records proved to be one of this project’s challenges. However, I believe the barriers I faced while requesting records provided me an authentic reporting experience. After I completed the 14-day content analysis of the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*, I sought a control for which I could base my results. Records from the law enforcement agencies seemed to be the best comparison.

I visited the Meigs County Sheriff’s Office in Pomeroy on Jan. 19 to ask what kind of records I could request. The dispatcher/secretary pulled aside Major Scott L. Trussell, who would be the main person handling my request. I explained my goals to Trussell in more detail: I had looked the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel* on 14 different days for the types of content, and I wanted to compare that to what actually occurred in the county. Trussell told me he could give me the aggregate number of crimes, such as robberies or domestic violence incidences. He also stated that I could request the number of complaints responded to on a specific day, which seemed to be the closest I
could get to a call log. I told him I would request information for those specific days later today in an email, and I sent him my questions that afternoon.

Trussell responded two days later, stating that my request would involve 68 reports, which at $5 per page, would cost me $340. I could not afford this pricetag, and furthermore it seemed unreasonable, even for a public records request. When I pressed for details, he said that he would be able to include some records on a CD for me for an additional $1. Trussell said the costs were due to redactions in the documents; before fulfilling my request, he would have to remove names and information about juveniles who appear in the reports, plus all social security numbers. The 32 reports that needed redactions plus the CD would still cost me $160. I received Provost’s Undergraduate Research Funding for my travel expenses, but I could not cut into that budget to pay for these records.

I strategized with Dr. Hendrickson, as well as Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Investigations Editor Ellen Gabler and Professor Bill Reader, who called in Dennis Hetzel of the Ohio Coalition for Open Government. Among that group, we looked into some case law, which demonstrated that Trussell’s cost estimate as an unlawful cost for public records. Based on case law established in State ex. rel The Warren Newspapers v. Hutson, it is unlawful to charge $5 to copy pages for a public records request, because paper and ink do not cost nearly that much, and public officials cannot include the cost of labor for a job they are already paid to perform. However, the case did not establish a cost for public documents.
Despite the precedence, we decided not to further pursue the request, through the sheriff’s office or in a court of law. Considering I only have a few months left with this project, any proceedings we began would inevitably stretch longer than the time I could devote to this project. Instead, Dr. Hendrickson and I strategized about what records I could request to establish the connection between the Daily Sentinel’s coverage and what is actually happening in law enforcement. We then noticed the “Most Wanted” feature on the sheriff’s website, a slideshow of the individuals wanted for crime in Meigs County. Dr. Hendrickson reasoned that this could be a huge tip-off for journalists: If the search for an individual is displayed prominently on the sheriff’s website, reporters have the basic information they need to write a blurb, if not a longer feature, about the individual or crime that is out there. It’s likely that community members would want to know about such individuals within their community. If reporters are ignoring such information, it may be because they are pursuing other priorities for stories, or perhaps they are outright ignoring or unaware of the sheriff’s office website.

I stopped into the Meigs County Sheriff’s Office once again on Jan. 28 to modify my request. Trussell was away at training, the on-duty dispatcher told me. I left a handwritten note, and he responded via email on Feb. 1 that the IT personnel for the office is checking into my request. He later got back to me and explained that the person in charge of the website will post any warrants at Trussell’s request, but takes them down once the person on the lam is recaptured. In other words, he has no records of individuals previously featured on the “Most Wanted” list.
However, I got the records in my hands on Feb. 18, one month after my initial visit to the Sheriff’s Office. After he told me that the “Most Wanted” archives were unavailable, Trussell cut me a deal: he would dismiss the cost of the single-page redactions and only charge me for multiple-page reports, bringing the cost down to $41. After talking with Dr. Hendrickson, we decided to take the deal, partially to get a random sample of Sheriff’s Office activity, and partially to keep up a relationship with Trussell, who said the records were already printed and pruned of redacted content for me.

When I arrived at the visitor’s entrance to pick up the manila envelope, Trussell asked about my project and major. Once I said the word “journalism,” he said he should have kept the $300 charge for those records. Based on my research, as well as previous interactions with law enforcement officers here and elsewhere, I don’t believe Trussell’s reaction was triggered by interactions with local media. He later confirmed my suspicions in an interview, stating that the media, specifically reporters for the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel, rarely if ever drill into actions or issues in the Sheriff’s Office, at least in his 30 years of experience with law enforcement. Rather, his response was triggered by media criticism of law enforcement activity rampant on the national level. My content analysis and interviews offer little evidence that local media has had a close thumb on law enforcement.

Lotz speculates that rifts between reporters and law enforcement officers lie in a lack of understanding among the key players’ activities: journalism and law enforcement (1991, p. 60). However, this tension could indicate that law enforcement
officers try to maintain control of their investigations, as discussed in Lotz (1991, p. 61). Regardless of the reason Trussell may be wary of the media, his response is at least an indication that there is not a strong, healthy relationship between the sheriff’s office and local media. If a relationship existed, both parties could benefit from the cooperation: the media could provide the transparency needed in this powerful, authoritative body, and the sheriff’s office could advise reporters in order to best inform their stories and communicate issues and improvements to people living in the community.

Independent Journalists in Appalachia

One of the more surprising and exciting discoveries from my thesis research has been the number of independent news blogs in Southeast Ohio. I first found the Meigs Independent Press and Carrie Gloeckner, the woman behind the WordPress site, but she then led me to others who operate similar outlets throughout the region. The blogs do not publish nearly as often as the papers produced by Civitas Media, but these sites, all run by women, do not have several full-time staff members devoted to reporting, advertising and managing either. The women I met have other jobs, but they spend their time and expendable income on hosting news sites, managing social media and watching for new stories and tips.

I started my first conversation with Carrie Gloeckner in a way that I normally do: I asked how she got started with the Meigs Independent Press. She took me back
to her first journalism job, a cops and courts beat at the Clermont Sun, and her first taste of community journalism.

Throughout the interview, Gloeckner seemed to plead the case for community journalism to me. She believes that people who know and love the community need to be the ones reporting on the community’s news in order to be accurate and fair to its members. She believes important issues are going uncovered because there is no reputable news source that is able to handle those challenges appropriately in a small community. But what matters most to Gloeckner is respect for the community. She spoke of how much she loves Meigs County, despite its depressing job losses and related issues. She does not see Meigs County as a small, insular group that is skeptical of criticism. She loves living in a community where she knows everyone, because they all come together to celebrate, mourn and pitch in when someone is in trouble.

Gloeckner’s love of the community motivates her to report, and to sometimes put down the notepad and camera. In motor vehicle fatalities, she puts her camera away to spare the victim’s family from seeing photos on Facebook. In other cases, rather than writing an exposé, Gloeckner said she will speak with a county official, mention a problem and suggest a change. She says Meigs County residents can be frigid to change and criticism, so rather than writing a harsh piece, she tries to subtly integrate a somewhat controversial topic, such as homosexuality, into her community event coverage.
As Gloeckner spoke about community journalism, I was instantly brought back to texts I had read in preparation for this project. Her fight to keep motor vehicle fatality photos off the Indy Press’ Facebook page reminded me of a question Lauterer asked in his comprehensive guide to community journalism: “What if it were your family?” Lauterer argues that community journalists must exercise extreme caution in running shocking photos specifically because circulation is so low; even if no one else can identify a victim, the family knows, and that family is likely going to be connected to the photographer in some way (2006, p. 264). Gloeckner referenced what she considered the major problems in the community, but not in an accusatory manner. She works to get the story online first, but she also works with the region in mind.

Selvin (2015) describes how “advocacy journalism” inherently lies in community reporting, strengthening a journalist’s role as someone informed and aware of the issues in a place and the characteristics that will help bridge it (p. 28). From the amount of time Gloeckner’s spent in the county, she’s come to know Meigs County’s major issues. But she also realizes that not every issue can be solved with a journalistic investigation. Instead, Gloeckner says she has a conversation with one of the village or county officials and sees what can happen from there. Her efforts show that she wants something more for the community, and she runs the Meigs Independent Press for more than public recognition.

Her monologues resounded with me. Because of her passion and dedication, I instantly felt her call to action to protect Meigs County and find and expose the corruption she believes to exist. After our conversation, Gloeckner said that I could
write stories for the *Meigs Independent Press* if I would like. I toyed with the idea, thinking the new role would allow me to learn more about Gloeckner and gain her trust, while simultaneously gaining trust from the community.

Part of the reason I was initially so convinced by Gloeckner’s story is that I identified so strongly with her opinions about community journalism. I see the need for it and the need to inform and inspire the community. Indeed, she hit a cornerstone concept of this project.

I would not be accurately reflecting the community if I considered Gloeckner as a colleague rather than a source. Coworker relationships involve some degree of trust more than relationships with sources, and I may feel more compelled to let some of Gloeckner’s claims stand in the place of investigations. In order to do the journalism that Meigs County deserves, I must investigate every claim I wish to write about, and make sure I have strong rationale backing those claims. However, there is another important breach in our relationship: she grew up in Meigs County, and I’m only a visitor. Without these roots or an explicitly close tie into the community, I may not be able to gain people’s trust as Gloeckner is able, and that may be an issue I just have to accept. However, the inherent goal of this project is to serve as some aid to the community, so even if my reporting does not reveal any major corruption or issues, I hope to at least start some conversation among citizens as to how news is covered in their county, and how they can improve where they live.

In addition, I recognized that many of Gloeckner’s most concerning claims were hearsay at best. She gave me some compelling tips to investigate, but I cannot
proceed as if I have hard evidence that there is corruption in any of the law enforcement offices in Meigs County.

However romantic Gloeckner’s notion of community journalism is, she is inherently limited by the same factor that strangles the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*: money. Gloeckner said she works other jobs – a clerk of courts, a co-director of the Meigs County Historical Society – because she makes little income from the *Meigs Independent Press*. Her daughter is the only other consistent “employee” of the *Indy Press* because they could not afford salaries. Their coverage is limited to Gloeckner’s few available hours in the day, so the *Press* becomes a resource for community events, sprinkled with Gloeckner’s occasional reported pieces and Ohio state agency news, which Gloeckner believes the *Daily Sentinel* lacks. Despite her efforts, Gloeckner alone does not have the time or resources to provide the reporting that Meigs County lacks.

The bottom line is the county needs a more robust news outlet that can conduct investigative – or at the very least, hard news – reporting. Throughout my reporting, I’ve talked to multiple people who are skeptical of the conduct of certain law enforcement officials. While I did cursory research into these allegations, I was unable to procure enough evidence to report upon this possible corruption. However, as an outsider to the community, it may not even be my place to expose any corruption in the county, unless I gained a full understanding of the county, its historical context and the impact this investigation would have on the community. Whether such claims are rumors or clues to a more sinister ground, they illustrate the void created in absence of
a sound news outlet. In the case of the *Sentinel*, emotive, celebratory profiles and features must exist alongside the damning investigations in order to achieve the balance that news outlets should strive for and citizens should expect from their news sources. Though law enforcement may scoff at reporters, officers operate better when kept in check. The public needs the press, and reporters are often among the few who stand up for a disadvantaged, marginalized or disenfranchised group.
Works Cited


Covering Appalachia

Note: This is a journalistic multimedia project in three parts. Bold, italic phrases throughout the story denote a multimedia aspect that will not appear in this document.

For the best viewing experience, please visit:

http://dk-o.atavist.com/journalism-in-appalachia

Introduction

In the course of about two hours, four customers wait by the glass front doors of the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel on a Tuesday afternoon in April. They all come by because they wonder what happened to their papers, or wish to check the status of their subscriptions.

The people of Meigs County, Ohio, a 23,257-person county in the Appalachian region, still seek to know what’s going on in their county.

However, Lorna Hart, the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel’s sole reporter, is the only person in the office. She steps away from the calls and research, investigating an arrest that impacted Meigs and neighboring Gallia counties, to tell her customers that the women in charge of advertising and circulation were out of the office. Their duties require them to visit advertisers throughout the day and make collections in person, leaving Hart alone in the newsroom.

Amid cries that journalism is in danger, few national news outlets and journalism professors feel that fear as distinctly as Hart, sole reporter for the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel, and her readership throughout Meigs County.
This multimedia project attempts to understand and explore what brought journalism in Meigs County to this point. Meigs is one county in a rural, Appalachian region, but its experiences are likely not unique, as journalism in large and small outlets takes on a corporate flavor.

The first part explores the past and present media environment in Meigs County, its coverage of law enforcement and the corporation behind the county’s one paper, the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*.

The second part focuses on a former reporter who now pursues journalism on her own time through a WordPress website.

The final installment seeks to understand the implications of a financially-limited press on the law enforcement, public offices and citizens of a rural, Appalachian county.

**Part One: Who’s reporting on Meigs County?**

The Meigs County Historical Society is stocked with heavy-duty plastic boxes of broadsheets. Most of the boxes are filled with the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*, the county’s flagship paper dating back to 1949. But the oldest papers bear the names of Meigs’ smaller townships – *The Rutland Journal, The Letart Lantern* – dating back to the mid and late 19th century.

Though the population of Meigs County, Ohio has never been overwhelming, the city bustled back in the day. The hillsides and rich soil brought in mining, and the river drew in barges and immigrants.
Meigs County became populated by hundreds of German immigrants, who established local newspapers. Papers would fade in and out of circulation, spreading word of world news, local events and gossip about the neighbors.

[TIMELINE: Meigs County’s newspapers throughout history]

The media environment today is starkly different. There is one newspaper in the entire county, and one reporter covers its 432 square miles of events and news updates.

The Appalachian county sits on the border of West Virginia, and it characterizes the rural poverty and unemployment common to the region. Many industries have uprooted their ties, taking much of the population with them.

Meigs County may seem easy to overlook among the 11.59 million people of Ohio. However, the county’s 23,257 people have accomplishments, commit crimes, feel pain and experience joy. They all have stories to tell, and the region requires impartial storytellers to interpret those stories.

Pomeroy has a local newsroom, which is more than some rural, Appalachian communities can claim.

The *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel* sits less than a block away from Meigs County’s pillars of justice: the Courthouse and the Sheriff’s Office, which serve as endless sources of news.

Civil and common pleas court judges dole out sentences daily. Cop cars frequently pull in and out of the building’s parking lot throughout the day. In this 1,800-person town, those two buildings hums with constant workweek activity.
The Sentinel’s one reporter on staff pours herself a cup of coffee when she gets in on a busy Tuesday. Lorna Hart notices the red mug sitting on her desk an hour and a half later, after running between local government buildings.

“I only drink cold coffee,” she remarks with a shrug.

[PHOTO: Lorna Hart interviews a source]

Even in a small Appalachian town, Hart finds herself consistently stretched thin. There is plenty to report, but one reporter cannot do it all herself.

The Business Behind Local News

The Pomeroy Daily Sentinel is owned by Civitas Media, a company based in Davidson, NC that operates the Pomeroy paper, its siblings in Gallipolis and Point Pleasant, Wv., and a few other small Ohio papers.

In name, Civitas Media is a nod to local, neighborhood values. “Civitas” is Latin for “community” or “citizen,” the website touts on its front page. But the media corporation was not formed by the communities it serves.

Civitas Media one cog in the Philadelphia-based machine Versa Capital Management. Versa, a limited liability company interested in buyouts, divestitures and liquidations, attempts to reduce costs and modify business operations until they are profitable again.

In 2011, Versa purchased Ohio Community Media, then the parent company of the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel, while it was simultaneously acquiring other media organizations from throughout the nation.
In 2012, it mashed four media organizations into Civitas Media, LLC, spanning 12 states with a workforce of 1,650 people.

The newsroom was transferred from the hands of an Ohio-based company to a large, national cost-reduction corporation.

Since its Versa acquisition, the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel, like many newspapers, has endured cost cuts, most of which correlate to fewer pages of the paper’s content.

**Before and After Civitas**

The Pomeroy Daily Sentinel fluctuates between 10 and 12 printed pages on four weekdays, and its Sunday edition includes around 15 pages.

The general weekday paper structure, based on an analysis of 14 days of coverage pulled randomly from the first half of 2015, allows for two or three pages of news, one or two pages of sports coverage, and one page each for obituaries and opinion pieces. Typically, one or two of the paper’s pages are filled solely with advertisements.

In 2009, the paper frequently spanned more than 20 pages. The Pomeroy Daily Sentinel still featured full-page ads, but it also had special sections for seniors and religious news.

In 14 days of coverage pulled randomly from the first half of 2015, there were only 12 stories that referenced any local law enforcement agency. Only half of those 12 stories focused on crime-related events that occurred in Meigs County.
The other half of sampled content consisted of press release information that detailed what initiatives local law enforcement was pursuing.

Based on another 14-day sample from the first half of 2009, before Versa Capital Management bought the Sentinel, the frequency of law enforcement-focused coverage was not markedly greater than what it is today. But what coverage was there was more often independently reported.

Pomeroy and other Meigs County townships received more attention in this sample, and the existing articles were more often about crimes in the county, rather than articles mimicking law enforcement agency press releases.

**Reporting from Meigs**

The crime-related media coverage of a June 23, 2015 event illustrates such paucity.

*[PHOTO: A display honoring deceased individuals set by the Meigs County Victims Assistance Program]*

On that day, Stacey Ratcliff and her partner at the time broke into her ex-husband’s home to drag their 7-year-old daughter out of her bed and into the waiting vehicle.

Ratcliff’s partner beat the girl’s babysitter as they put the child in the car and drove off. The babysitter quickly called his employer, Chadd Ratcliff, who was working at the Mark Porter Chevrolet Buick GMC dealership in Pomeroy.
After Ratcliff called the Sheriff’s Office, a search ensued and an Amber alert was issued, until West Virginia law enforcement officers caught the runaway Dodge Durango in a Walmart parking lot in Ripley, Wv.

WSAZ and WCHS, two broadcast operations in both Huntington and Charleston, arrived on the scene of the arrest to capture video and photos of the arrest and reunion. The Meigs County Sheriff’s Office sent a press release and alerts to the media on the subject.

The Pomeroy Daily Sentinel, the county’s most local news outlet, ran a 26-word brief on the abduction, about four hours after the Sheriff’s office responded to the scene. The report said more information would be published when it became available, but that story was never updated.

Reporters without Resources

Lindsay Kriz, a fledgling reporter in 2014 who had just graduated from Western Kentucky University, was assigned to Civitas’ Pomeroy base in 2014 to help Charlene Hoeflich, a reporter nearing retirement, maintain her assignments and put out a paper every five days. When Hoeflich left the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel in 2014, Kriz took on all editorial responsibilities - interviewing sources, writing stories, taking the occasional photo, and editing submitted obituaries - by herself.

For more than four months, Kriz produced all the paper’s news content, aside from high school sports coverage, the Kentucky native, says about this time.
Since the onset of this project, she found a new job working for *The Brunswick Beacon* in North Carolina, after about two years at the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*.

Kriz had no other reporter or editor to mentor her, so she says she struggled with story ideas in her early months with the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*.

Kriz says that about every two weeks, she reported on law enforcement after she received a press release from one of the local officers. But at the beginning, she says she was not included on the Meigs County Sheriff’s Office email list, or perhaps they had the wrong email address. Either way, this information was essential to her reporting on crime and law enforcement in Meigs County.

*PHOTO: Pomeroy Daily Sentinel reporter interviews Meigs County Sheriff Keith Wood.*

Meigs County Sheriff Keith Wood determines when a press release will be sent out to reporters, according to Major Scott Trussell of the Meigs County Sheriff’s Office. Trussell then writes up a brief, revealing as much of the situation as he can without compromising an investigation, and gets the sheriff’s approval before sending out information to local press such as the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*, WSAZ and WOWK in Huntington and Charleston, Wv., and the *Athens Messenger* in Athens County, Oh., among other agencies, he says.

“I don’t put everything in there,” Trussell said. “You know the media wants to know, but I put in there the things I think they need to know to write the stories so the public can be made aware of certain things.”
Trussell says he will answer follow up questions via email or call, but there are not many situations where he can offer more information because of the ongoing investigation. But several reporters have the Sheriff Wood’s cell phone number, and Wood is often willing to give a quote, Trussell said.

[AUDIO: Major Scott Trussell of the Meigs County Sheriff’s Office on the importance of trusting the journalists with whom he interacts.]

Kriz says she relied on press releases because the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel’s office does not have a radio scanner. In most newsrooms, journalists use a scanner to hear what calls come into law enforcement and what they respond to. This, in turn, puts more editorial control in the journalists’ hands by allowing reporters to determine a call’s newsworthiness.

The Pomeroy Daily Sentinel has not had a scanner at all while she had worked in Pomeroy, Kriz says, though the Gallipolis and Point Pleasant papers have scanners.

“It feels like they’re cutting back,” Kriz said, “So when are we going to get that scanner?”

For Michael Johnson, the editor of the three Ohio River Valley papers, acquiring a scanner for the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel rests solely on timing.

When Civitas Media purchases supplies for its publications, it announces the purchase via email, stating that “the first 20” or so editors to respond are given the scanner or voice recorder or whatever supply they mention, Johnson says. Johnson has yet to respond fast enough.
Creature comforts, like a new microwave for the Pomeroy office, seemed out of the question, Kriz says.

“Our microwave broke down in the office, and we asked the lady down there what we could do,” Kriz said. “She actually said, I thought she was kidding, but she was serious: ‘Take up a collection to get one.’ They wouldn’t even get us that.”

Kriz says she and her coworker Lorna Hart craved one major modification to their roles at the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel: beats, or the topical designations given to general news reporters.

*Reporters are Resources*

Hart, who started working for the Sentinel in 2015, and Kriz tried to divvy up the topics they covered at the Sentinel. Kriz focused on law enforcement, breaking news, and later in her time at the paper, court coverage. Hart wrote about community events and agricultural stories, since she also wrote for Salt Magazine, another Civitas publication focused on lifestyle.

But both Hart and Kriz prefer writing feature stories and would rather spend their time working on historical pieces or positive community stories instead of covering hard news or investigative pieces.

Kriz says she would like to further develop her skills and confidence as a reporter before she would want to take on enterprise or investigative reporting.
“I still have anxiety,” Kriz said. “I feel like I’m always separate from that, like if I have to interview someone big and scary I’m always like ‘oh god.’ I think that would help me grow, to put myself out there.”

Kriz preemptively packed up her Gallipolis apartment in February. She had two interviews in different states, and she felt certain she could land a better journalism job.

Kriz’s primary motivation was the pay. She came into the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel* believing her salary was $25,000 a year, but instead she would earn $11 an hour for a maximum 37.5 hours a week. Even with another reporter beside her, Kriz says she put in more than 37.5 hours. Kriz says she would not have been able to take the job if she was older than 26 and therefore could not be covered by her parent’s health insurance plan.

“I’d like to have a job where I can have some savings. My goal is to travel, that’s my thing, that’s what I work towards,” Kriz says. “I’d like to save money for that, and it feels like sometimes I have to move stuff around for this bill or that bill.”

But Kriz cites her own professional development as another incentive. Kriz says she feels she would be able to become a better journalist if she was working alongside multiple journalists, who had an editor in the office to oversee and offer advice.

Kriz says she sometimes looks back at *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel* court and crime coverage from just a few years ago, and wishes she had the opportunity to emulate the
more-robust reporting. But because she only had one other colleague, court coverage was sometimes bypassed for other county events.

“There [used to be] hard news on the front all the time,” Kriz said. “We struggle with that, but I don’t always have time to sit in court all day.”

Part Two: Reporting from Outside the Newsroom

Carrie Gloeckner, founder of the Meigs Independent Press, recalls the exact details of the moment in early 2013 when she decided to revisit journalism. She says she was working as a substitute teacher at the time when a controversy in Pomeroy stirred her to the point that she felt journalistically responsible to act.

The story involved the now-former Pomeroy mayor, Mary McAngus, who resigned amid accusations that she was homophobic, specifically toward an openly gay Pomeroy Police officer, Kyle Calendine.

The Pomeroy Police Chief said McAngus had used the word “queer” and other slurs toward that officer, and had complained that his spouse had visited the police office, according to coverage from February 2013.

Reporters from Columbus, Huntington, Parkersburg and other publications throughout the nation picked up on the controversy that racked Meigs County’s seat.

“I stood there in my living room and I watched WSAZ and I said ‘Nobody’s asking the right questions,’” Gloeckner said.

But what had happened before the police chief’s accusation? Gloeckner thought that this question would change the way the story was told.
Gloeckner decided to start her own news website, the *Meigs Independent Press*, to apply what she had learned about community journalism. She hopes this news site could become a tool to better her community, she says.

Now, three years later, some Meigs County officials and agencies refuse to recognize her as a reporter. Yet week after week, she goes to village council meetings, reports on road closings and car accidents and posts about upcoming events to help inform the county’s residents through the *Meigs Independent Press*.

*[VIDEO: Carrie Gloeckner on why she started the Meigs Independent Press, and what community journalism means to her.]*

**Entering Digital Journalism**

Gloeckner says because of her previous work experience with established print newspapers, she was already familiar with the basics of state and local laws, city council meeting procedures and best practices for talking with law enforcement officers.

After studying journalism and English at the University of Rio Grande, she reported for the *Clermont Sun*, where she worked with law enforcement while covering other local events and stories.

“I learned how to work with police and I learned that as a part of the community,” Gloeckner said. “And sometimes there’s a balance between being in that community and just being a journalist.”
Gloeckner returned to her hometown of Meigs County and worked as a copy editor and then reporter for the *Gallipolis Daily Tribune*. She says she lost that job because she missed a village council meeting. After that experience, Gloeckner went back to school to gain certification as a teacher.

She says she hadn’t thought about reporting again until hearing about the controversy arose between McAngus and Pomeroy Police Chief Mark Proffitt.

*[PHOTO: Carrie Gloeckner rifles through old newspapers.]*

But rather than reapplying to work for Civitas Media, she started the *Meigs Independent Press*, a news website that highlights events in the community, and increasingly, covers law enforcement and local politics.

She controls the WordPress site from her iPad, and she and her daughter update the content as they get notifications about Meigs County events or press releases from the Ohio Attorney General’s Office.

She gathers information and story ideas through many of the same channels a newspaper reporter would. Gloeckner says she attempts to attend every Pomeroy Village Council meeting to glean what’s going on in the county, and she occasionally meets with Meigs County Sheriff Keith Wood. She meets local officials, business owners and other sources at the Wild Horse Café in Pomeroy to hold conversations and enjoy the view of a slow sunset over the river dividing Ohio and West Virginia. In addition, she says she generally tries to drive around Pomeroy to check what is going on.
Gloeckner says she was able to beat the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*, the established news organization, to a story about a meth bust because she noticed a cluster of Sheriff’s cars.

She says she often works with tips passed along by her friends and readers of the *Meigs Independent Press* and its Facebook page. Not every tip leads to a story, she says, but they give her an idea of what is happening and what people in Pomeroy are thinking about those events.

Her attention to the website varies according to her work schedule for paid, part-time jobs in advertising.

Her list of story ideas piles higher and higher as she talks with her county’s public officials. Gloeckner says her lack of spare time deters her from pursuing every accountability piece she wants to write.

*Revisiting a Controversy*

Starting the *Meigs Independent Press* provided Gloeckner the platform to revisit the story that initially vexed her in 2013.

Gloeckner believes that the accusations against former Pomeroy Mayor Mary McAngus stem from an incident that occurred early in the former mayor’s tenure.

On Jan. 3, 2012, her second day in office, Mayor Mary McAngus fired Pomeroy Police Chief Mark Proffitt because he would not rehire officers whom he had fired. But that night, three of the five Pomeroy Village Council members, a majority among the body, voted to keep Proffitt in office.
“This smacks of small town politics,” Gloeckner says of the dispute.

Gloeckner was unable to confirm her suspicions, but she interviewed McAngus and Calendine, the officer at the center of the issue, one year after the controversy occurred. According to Gloeckner’s story, Calendine and McAngus talked and became friendly acquaintances as the controversy calmed.

About one month later, Calendine filed suit against the Pomeroy Police Department and the village of Pomeroy after he was permanently suspended from the police with no notice, Calendine said at the time. The suit was dismissed in full on July 27, 2015.

Gloeckner believes her news values emanate from the most basic place: instinct.

“You just have to go with your gut a lot of times: are they telling you what you need to know, are you getting what you need to know, or is there more to the story.”

But Gloeckner says she does not report about every controversy or corrupt instance she investigates. In some cases, she instead choses to discuss the issue or topic with some of the local public officials.

“There’ve been times when I seem to think ‘I’m sure that’s not supposed to happen,’” Gloeckner said. “But it comes down to deciding if that’s worth doing, or should I just go to somebody and say ‘hey, is this what we’re supposed to be doing?’ And then letting them know I’m watching.”
Back to Journalism

Gloeckner says she decided to distance herself from journalism for several months. After operating both the *Meigs Independent Press* and the *Gallia Hometown Herald*, a similar news site she took on when its original owner, Michelle Miller of Gallia County, wanted to take a break. During this time, her daughter took control of the *Herald*, and Gloeckner says she only occasionally contributed to the *Press*.

But since the beginning of 2016, Gloeckner says she decided to make reporting on her county’s news her enduring priority.

“‘I’ve listened to family that say you need to do something a little more stable or whatever,’” Gloeckner said. “‘It’s not worth it to me to make money and be unhappy. I want to be able to go to sleep at night and know that I did something that made a difference.’”

Gloeckner mentions a handful of Meigs County story ideas that she hopes to write: the reportedly unnecessary floodplain status of different sections of the county, guides to local government and basic law, and crime and court pieces about Middleport.

She says she hopes to find another reporter to cover smaller Meigs’ townships and regions in the county, such as Rutland, Racine and Syracuse, but she worries she would not be able to obtain stable advertisers for the site to help pay another journalist.

Her time away from the *Press* has distanced her from the sources she once worked with, Gloeckner says.
Gloeckner says she has a strong relationship with the Meigs County Sheriff’s Office and the County Commissioners, but she is trying to reach other officials in the community.

“It takes the footwork to get there because they don’t offer [information] up,” Gloeckner said. “You have to track that down.”

She says she does not have a strong relationship with the Pomeroy Police Department, and she believes that is because of her previous reporting on the former mayor of Pomeroy.

“They don’t really communicate with me, but there’s a reason for that,” Gloeckner said. “They will if I press them, but they’re not going to hand it out.”

Although Gloeckner said she tries to talk to him, Pomeroy Police Chief Mark Proffitt expresses little, if any, mutual interest.

“I know who she is,” Proffitt said. “But I don’t get on the social media so I don’t know what she does.”

To resolve such issues, Gloeckner said she hopes to work this summer on branding the site as a destination for local news. Her strategy is to proactively reach out and talk to people throughout the county.

Gloeckner sees potential in the Press as she starts to report more frequently. She wants to write a feature similar in form to the Ohio State Bar Association’s “Law You Can Use” column, but focused on small town government.
“Of course ignorance of the law is not a defense,” Gloeckner said. “But we have this pop culture understanding of what the law is from shows like Law and Order. That’s not how it works.”

Regardless of how the Meigs Independent Press transforms as she continues reporting, Gloeckner has one prevailing priority: civic improvement for Meigs County.

“It takes forever to do culture change,” Gloeckner said. “It doesn’t happen overnight; it’s a long term goal. My only goal is to make my county better.”

Part Three: The Stories We Don’t See

One audience member had a question for the Pomeroy Village Council during its March 7 meeting. Why was construction of the village’s new skate park about $10,000 higher than its original budget?

Sue Porter, council clerk, offered an explanation, noting that the contractor purchased things on the Village dime that were not typically used to construct a skate park, including drywall, rebar, and about a dozen hunting knives. Porter acknowledged that the project, budgeted originally at $27,000, cost $37,000 after its completion.

Upon finding out, the village deducted those expenses from the contractor’s salary. But the fact remained that he had made the purchases without any original permission from the council.

Pomeroy officials viewed the blunder in stride.
“It sounds to me like a line needs to be drawn on the bid on what materials it takes,” said Meigs County Commissioner Randy Smith during the meeting. “It doesn’t take drywall to build a skate park.”

A wise writer understands the need for an editor. An experienced programmer tests his or her code before taking it live. And public officials, at all levels, function at their best when someone is paying attention.

To whit, public officials, like private citizens, make mistakes. Sometimes they catch their own errors, as the council did in this instance. But it is likely that on occasion, they don’t.

In America, the press is granted constitutional rights to act as an external watchdog, whether it’s to monitor village-level officials or the President. Public servants and elected officials exercise varying levels of power that can be used to the benefit or detriment of the citizens they serve. This is American democracy, and its health depends on a free and vibrant press to act as monitors of its administration.

If the press cannot function as it is intended, public institutions can become breeding grounds for neglect or corruption, and underrepresented or uninformed citizens are denied the opportunity to be heard, much less considered. While it seems rational to associate corruption only with governments devoid of a free press, it seems equally plausible to relate abuses of power with a silence in questions. How are we to know it does or does not exist if no one is watching?
Unreported Issues

Pomeroy is the municipality tied to the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel’s* name, but the paper, the sole news source focused on Meigs County, rarely mentions the smaller towns in within Meigs’ borders.

Reporters Lorna Hart of the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel* and Carrie Gloeckner of the WordPress blog the *Meigs Independent Press* both say their daily routine requirements leave them with little spare time to report on news or events outside Pomeroy. Michael Johnson, editor for the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*, said he would like to have more coverage on the smaller townships in his circulation region, but his small staff of reporters make coverage of smaller townships impossible.

Both Hart and Gloeckner said they do not have relationships with the smaller townships’ village councils or the Middleport Police Department and jail. Both say they would like to write more about events outside of Meigs’ county seat, but they would need another reporter to cover those areas.

Gloeckner says she believes there are issues to investigate in Middleport and Rutland, but as a lone journalist, she chooses to focus on Pomeroy.

However, even while two reporters were working for the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*, Hart says it was difficult to reach townships more than a half hour drive from her office. She says she feels most aware of news from Middleport, a town of about 2,500 people located two miles down the same Main Street that runs through Pomeroy. Even so, Hart notes that she does not contact the Middleport Police
Department, which also houses the county jail, as frequently as she does the Pomeroy-based Meigs County Sheriff and Pomeroy Police offices.

[PHOTO: Pomeroy Daily Sentinel Reporter Lorna Hart speaks with her boss, Editor Michael Johnson.]

Johnson says he has been trying to hire more freelance reporters to cover some of the more distant stretches of the three counties. He notes one example, a former editor for the Point Pleasant Register no longer wanted to manage the paper, but she still writes about village council meetings and events in Mason County on a freelance basis.

Johnson also successfully hired Hart’s son, Michael Hart, to write for the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel and be paid on a per-story basis. Michael Hart primarily reports on Pomeroy, picking up what he can to help Lorna Hart.

It has been difficult for the few reporters in the Ohio Valley region to establish relationships in the smaller villages and townships, Johnson says.

“It’s establishing the relationship because they haven’t seen anyone from the paper in X amount of years possibly,” Johnson says.

[AUDIO: Ohio Valley Civitas Editor Michael Johnson on ways to try and increase coverage of Meigs County’s smaller townships.]

To rectify her physical absence and broaden community coverage, Hart says she encouraged individuals from the county’s schools and local civic organizations to send photos to the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel. But she says even that interaction has tapered off.
“I think they’re almost at the point where they used to send things in, but now nothing happened,” Hart says. “They didn’t get any attention, so they just quit.”

The Paper Changes Hands

After Johnson left the *Alamogordo Daily News* in New Mexico three years ago to join the Ohio Valley Civitas papers, he says he met some resistance from the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*’s audience.

Within months of Johnson’s arrival, two prominent reporters left the paper. Sarah Hawley, who had covered crime and court cases for the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel* for two years, left for a reporting position on the neighboring Athens County paper, the *Athens Messenger*, where she received the promise of more opportunities.

Then, in September 2014, Charlene Hoeflich retired after 47 years writing for the *Daily Sentinel*. Although Hoeflich was born in Athens County, according to the paper’s published announcement of her departure, she was the longtime face of the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*.

Hoeflich declined to be interviewed about her experience with the paper and the reason she retired for this story. But her journalistic imprint upon the paper endures. As a woman reporting alongside men in a male-dominated field, Hoeflich inspired both Gloeckner and Hart to become professional journalists.

Johnson says the community took note of Hoeflich’s departure, and readers frequently questioned any changes implemented after she left. Johnson notes that for
the most part, readers seem to understand that his newer leadership will differ from Hoeflich’s.

“Charlene was here for so long that she was a pillar,” Johnson says.

“Everybody knew when you walked in here, Charlene was gonna be here. Charlene ran the place, pretty much. And when she was gone, it just comes down to a change issue.”

*The Power of the Ads*

But for the journalists still employed by the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*, the management changes also introduced some workplace modifications. Hart says she’s seen the features she writes morph when confronted by Civitas’ advertising goals.

In one case, Hart says it was implied that she stop writing features about a theater group from Middleport that runs on donations because it could not buy ads in the *Pomeroy Daily Sentinel*.

Regardless, those types of feature stories, traditionally in Section C of the *Sentinel*, were Hart’s favorites, as they gave her the opportunity to cover human interest topics, such as historical stories and family and community events. But new management’s eye on the bottom line thought otherwise, and the section was condensed into one back page in the sports section, she said.

“I loved it, it was mine, it was my chance to put those historic things in there, or the fun things with the kids,” Hart said. “We get one page on the back because they weren’t selling advertising.”
“So if I said ‘nah’ and the ad falls through…you’re not exactly told, but it’s becoming more and more implied that that’s exactly what you do.”

And Then There Was One

[VIDEO: Lorna Hart reporting for the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel.]

Throughout most of 2015, the paper’s two staff reporters, Hart and Lindsay Kriz, did not have assigned beat topics like education or cops and courts; they just covered as many stories as they could manage. But informally, Kriz handled a majority of the cops and court coverage while Hart focused on feature writing and assignments for Salt Magazine, another Civitas Media publication.

When Kriz left in March 2016, the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel’s editorial staff was reduced to one: Hart.

Hart says her obstacle is traveling to and from story assignments. Meigs is a rural county, and although the population is small, breaking news is not confined to one central location. She often has to drive 20 or 30 minutes to a story from her office in Pomeroy.

In addition, many of the county’s rural areas are media deserts, and Hart often loses internet and data connection and must drive back to Pomeroy to submit her stories. She says having an additional reporter would help dilute such deadline stress.

Her son, Michael, has recently taken a job as a freelance reporter for the Sentinel, but Michael says he puts countless more hours into the paper than he is compensated for, as a reporter working on a per-story basis.
Corporate Clout

Although Lindsay Kriz’s full-time reporter position existed at the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel one month prior, Johnson says he must wait for Civitas Media to once again approve the second journalist position before candidate interviews can begin.

“When you have local control it’s probably a little bit easier to get that [new reporter],” Johnson said. “It’s a different way when you’re in a corporate structure. That’s just the way it is, I’ve learned that.”

Johnson says his past experiences working for other small newspapers with large corporate ownership were similar.

Johnson says he’d like to have at least two reporters at each paper, but he is now wary about his requests. Recently, he had two news reporters writing for the Gallipolis Daily Tribune. However, when he wanted to add a third reporter to the sports team, which is responsible for covering all high school sports in the three counties, Johnson was asked to move one news reporter onto the sports staff, he says.

Johnson notes Civitas Media-owned Point Pleasant Register is also supposed to have a second reporter, Johnson says. Given that the reporter for the Register, Beth Sergent, has worked alone for most of her career at the paper, but Johnson says he would like to give her some deadline relief.

“I think she’s used to flying solo for so long, but I don’t want her to get burned out if she’s not already,” Johnson said, noting that his multiple requests for a second Point Pleasant Register reporter also went unanswered.
“Unfortunately I don’t have any control basically over that,” Johnson says.

“That’s something that’d be a corporate-level decision, whether they’d want to approve that or not, and I think it’s been dark for so long that it’s just kind of gone away.”

Making the Decision to Leave

When Lindsay Kriz considers how she could improve her writing, she often reflects on Sarah Hawley’s days at the Sentinel.

Hawley now works for the Athens Messenger, which covers a larger county, a larger population, and a university town that provides reporters with a steady stream of more colorful news.

During her first couple years at the Athens Messenger, Hawley says she’s had the opportunity to change beats. She says she started reporting about education, but now she covers crime and court stories.

“Pay-wise, it’s the same, but to me it seems like a step up,” Hawley says.

“Crime is more intensive and what people look for, so I guess it seemed to me that it was a step in the right direction.”

In addition, Hawley says she’s received guidance, evaluations and a pay raise at the Athens Messenger, opportunities devoid to her while working for Civitas Media.

“This just seems like such a better work environment,” Hawley says. “They seem to want to help you grow. We sit and have conversations about what you can do better, or what you should and shouldn’t do.”
Hawley started her career in journalism in 2009 at the Gallipolis Daily Tribune, but was eventually moved to the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel, where she says she became passionate about reporting on the courts and law enforcement.

Major Scott Trussell of the Meigs County Sheriff’s Office says he enjoys working with Hawley because they developed a rapport. If Hawley heard a rumor about the Meigs County Sheriff’s Office, she would start her investigation by approaching Trussell, he says.

She gained his trust by being patient, he says. Trussell would often tell her that he could not reveal details of a situation in the moment, but he could offer her more details the next day, he says.

Even now, more than two years later, Trussell still keeps Hawley on his press release list and says he frequently talks to her and answers her questions.

Hawley says she believes the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel’s relationship with law enforcement officers such as Trussell was damaged when Civitas waited three months to replace her position as crime reporter.

“That really hurt because there was no way that I could fill her in,” Hawley said. “By that point, you’ve lost your relationships.

“Once you damage that relationship, it’s very hard to build it back.”

[AUDIO: Sarah Hawley on Meigs County and her decision to leave the Pomeroy Daily Sentinel.]

Hawley is a lifelong Meigs County resident, and she’s not one to say never.
“Would I love to eventually go back down there?” Hawley said. “For the right thing, yeah. I mean, I miss the people. That was the community I grew up in. I live down there.”