Charlotte Tillar Schexnayder attended her first Arkansas Press Association conference in 1945 as editor of The McGehee Times. “I was there to pick up an award of excellence from APA,” said the 94-year-old former editor and publisher of the Dumas Clarion. Cozy in her room at a nursing facility in West Little Rock, she began to recall a newspaper career that took her to all 50 states and five countries.

Melvin Schexnayder returned from service in World War II and they married in 1946. After completing degrees at Louisiana State University (LSU), they moved to Texas where Melvin went to work as an engineer. But the pull of Arkansas and Charlotte’s widowed mother, Bertha Tillar, was strong. The couple answered W.M. Jackson’s request to run The McGehee Times as a team, with Charlotte as editor and Melvin as ad manager.

After they had worked in McGehee six years, the Schexnayders were recruited by the people of Dumas to run the Clarion. “Jack Dante, a friend of Melvin’s through the Boy Scouts, said they would put up the money and we could pay them back when we could. Now that’s an offer,” she said.

On March 4, 1954, they began a 44-year stint at the Dumas Clarion. Running a newspaper had been Charlotte’s dream since she created her first four-page edition as a seventh-grade English project. “All my life I wanted to be a newspaper editor,” she recalled. “There was never a day I didn’t find it challenging. Journalism was my calling, and I think you have to truly enjoy what you do and find a purpose in it. I did. It was the hardest work, and the most rewarding. But many times, it was just fun!”

Fun is also how Charlotte describes the Arkansas Press Association (APA) conferences throughout the years. When her children were young, her mother came along and kept the kids while she and Melvin attended the meetings. Then the whole family enjoyed socializing.

“From the beginning we tried to go to APA meetings – we loved them. It was like a large family you saw twice a year,” she said. “We were career newspaper people, and family ownership was the bedrock of APA back then. Arkansas families owned papers for

Legislative Action Needed:

The Arkansas Press Association (APA) has been added as a member of the Stop Tariffs on Printers and Publishers (STOPP) Coalition, being coordinated by The News Media Alliance. The group is fighting the unwarranted preliminary countervailing and antidumping duties imposed this year by the Department of Commerce on Canadian imports of uncoated ground paper, which includes newsprint.

“In speaking with newspaper owners and publishers across Arkansas, I’ve heard many instances where this tariff is already impacting our members – both in operational costs and newsprint supply,” said Ashley Wimberley, executive director of APA. “When combined, these duties can climb as high as 32 percent, and we need our association members to contact Gov. Asa Hutchison and our representatives and senators in the U.S. Congress asking them to request that the International Trade Commission reject these newsprint tariffs.”

The Commission will hold a hearing on the case on July 17, and the coalition is encouraging Members of Congress to testify and submit comments prior to the hearing. Here is a link to some talking points on the issue that you can use in editorials or in your communication with policymakers: https://www.newsmediaalliance.org/background-newsprint-tariffs/.

In addition to contacting policymakers, we ask that you let your readers know what is at stake by publishing the guest editorial on page three of this edition of the Arkansas Publisher Weekly. It can also be found at this link: https://www.newsmediaalliance.org/ceo-column-newsprint-tariffs/.

“These tariffs will not only hurt the newspaper industry, they will hurt the local communities and businesses we serve,” added Wimberley.
APA editorial contest entries due this week

The deadline to submit entries for the 2018 Arkansas Press Association Better Newspaper Editorial Contest is this Saturday, March 31.

To submit your entries, visit this link: http://www.newspapercontest.com/Contests/ArkansasPressAssociation.aspx.

The awards will be presented at the APA SuperConvention on Saturday June 30 at the Inn of the Ozarks in Eureka Springs.

Have questions? Call the APA office at (501) 374-1500.

Charlotte Schexnayder
Continued from page 1

...generations. APA members worked very hard, and we enjoyed exchanging stories and getting together.”

Both Schexnayders became president of the APA board – Melvin in 1962 and Charlotte in 1982. Charlotte also served as president of the National Federation of Press Women in the late ‘70s and the National Newspaper Association in the ‘90s. Leadership in industry organizations took her around the country and the world.

However, her home remained the Arkansas Delta. “Dumas is a wonderful, wonderful community,” she said. “The people there may disagree, call you names and even threaten you, but they realize you are the heart and soul of the community. They, most of them, want you to succeed.”

Charlotte wrote four editorials a week for more than four decades. “I am proud that some of my editorials led to change that was needed, like the new high school,” she said. “I stood for people who had no voice, and when I saw an injustice I tried to address it. Sometimes there were too many to address.”

She recalls that during the years they ran the Dumas Clarion, Arkansas newspaper owners helped each other by loaning equipment or emergency press time. One time when the Clarion presses broke down, the Schexnayders were able to print their paper in Stuttgart. Another time they were able to use facilities in Cabot.

Charlotte had a second career as a member of the Arkansas General Assembly from 1984 to 1999. The couple sold the Clarion in 1988, and Melvin passed away in 2007. “Salty Old Editor – An Adventure in Ink,” a delightful autobiography, was published by Charlotte in 2012.

She remained a powerful community leader in Dumas until she moved to Little Rock to be closer to some of her family. That family now includes her three children, nine grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren, with two more greats on the way.

Last year Charlotte was planning on attending the 2017 APA conference when a fall and a bout with pneumonia changed her course. She doesn’t see well because of macular degeneration, but she has many visitors and gets out fairly often with friends and family. Her voice remains clear and deliberate when discussing the future of the newspaper industry.

“I believe the small-town newspaper will remain a part of our lives. It will survive in the future in some form, and will continue to document news along with births, deaths, funerals, commencements and weddings,” Charlotte said. “A free press is the guardian of our democracy. In whatever form, it must be preserved.”

Deadline for APA special award nominations is tomorrow

Tomorrow, Friday, March 30, is the deadline for making nominations for the annual APA “special awards” to be presented Friday, June 29, at the annual SuperConvention at the Inn of the Ozarks in Eureka Springs.

The nomination form can be found on the APA website at this link: https://tinyurl.com/y9cmv2ya.

The special awards include: Golden 50 Service Award, Distinguished Service Award, Headliner of the Year, Journalism Educator Award and the Freedom of Information Award.

The APA board of directors will select the honorees from the nominations submitted at their annual spring meeting on April 5.
Guest Editorial:  
Canadian Newsprint Is Not the Enemy — Tariffs Are  
By David Chavern, President & CEO of the News Media Alliance

Every day at the News Media Alliance headquarters, a stack of newspapers arrives for myself and the staff. But with the Department of Commerce and the International Trade Commission currently considering tariffs on Canadian newsprint, those days of screen-free reading could be coming to an end.

The fact that newsprint is being threatened is the work of one newsprint mill in the Pacific Northwest, NORPAC. In August 2017, NORPAC petitioned the United States Department of Commerce to begin applying tariffs to newsprint imported from Canada, claiming the imported paper was harming the U.S. newsprint industry. But NORPAC is not acting in the best interests of newsprint consumers or the U.S. paper industry at large — they are acting in their own interest and no one else’s.

The buying and selling of newsprint has always been regional without regard for the border. Consumers of newsprint — from newspaper and book publishers to telephone directory manufacturers — tend to buy newsprint in their region, close to their printing operations. The printers who typically utilize Canadian newsprint are those in the northeast and Midwest, where there are currently no U.S. mills operating.

But those regions are not newspaper deserts because of unfair trade by Canadian paper mills. Rather, newspaper mills shut down or converted to producing other, more profitable paper products when the demand for newsprint fell, something that has been happening steadily for decades. Since 2000, the demand for newsprint in North America has dropped by 75 percent.

But affordable Canadian paper has helped keep the printed news alive and flourishing well into the 21st century. With new tariffs, many smaller newspapers will feel their belts tightening. The combination of preliminary countervailing and antidumping duties increases the cost of imported newsprint by as much as 32 percent, and a number of newspapers have already experienced price increases and a disruption in supply. If the International Trade Commission and the Department of Commerce make these tariffs permanent in the coming months, it could lead some small local publishers to cut their print product entirely — or even shut their doors.

Some, like NORPAC, may argue that by imposing duties on Canadian imports we’re saving American jobs and boosting our own economy, but while that may sometimes be true for other industries, the opposite is true of newsprint.

What we’re seeing with the newsprint tariffs is not a government acting to try to better the economy for its citizens. Instead, it is “political arbitrage” by one private investment group — where they are effectively looking to use the U.S. government to tax local and community newspapers across the United States in order to bolster their own bottom line.

When considering whether to take NORPAC’s claims seriously, the Department of Commerce excluded input from U.S. newsprint mills owned by Canadian companies — specifically Resolute Forest Products and White Birch. Excluding manufacturers who, during the period of investigation, had three functioning newsprint mills in the U.S. because they have sister mills in Canada shows an unwillingness to understand the borderless newsprint industry and the restructuring that has taken place in recent decades.

If the tariffs on Canadian newsprint are allowed to stand, we’re not only risking a centuries-old relationship with our neighbors to the north, but we’re putting our own U.S. news industry in jeopardy. While the big national and regional papers may have less trouble finding the funds to keep their print editions coming, we could see small publishers lose footing, and those tiny local papers are some of the most vital members of our news community. Under the right conditions, those papers can find a way to maintain their footing, but if the newsprint industry can’t support them, those communities will become news deserts, and that’s a future none of us want.

We may not be able to save the entire industry by keeping tariffs off our paper, but we can keep it thriving while we reposition ourselves for the years to come. Having affordable newsprint will help us do that.

David Chavern serves as president & CEO of the News Media Alliance. Chavern has built a career spanning 30 years in executive, strategic and operational roles, and most recently completed a decade-long tenure at the United States Chamber of Commerce.

Arkansas Publisher Weekly  
March 28, 2018