Patience is the lesson of Kelly Sublett’s newspaper journey

Monticello native Kelly Sublett has returned to her Arkansas roots. Named group publisher for the Log Cabin Democrat in Conway, the Van Buren County Democrat in Clinton and the Sun-Times in Heber Springs in January, Sublett feels lucky to have a newspaper past that provides her the pieces of the puzzle needed to point her staff in the right direction for growth.

“GateHouse Media purchased the Log Cabin in October and moved me from the vice president of audience job managing editorial to the publisher position,” she said. “I’m still using the lessons I learned back at my first newspaper job in Texas – to have patience and take time to know the people in the community. I tell both reporters and ad sales people to slow down and have a plan.”

Sublett grew up in Burnet, Texas, a small town north of Austin, where her parents were educators. Her first newspaper job was at the Citizens Gazette in Burnet. There, a 12-year-old Sublett rolled papers every Tuesday and learned the basics from her first mentor Rick Espitia.

“Patience is the most important thing I learned from Rick. Not everyone is in as big a hurry as you are, and you have to take time to put together the nuts and bolts of a story,” she said.

After graduating from Texas A&M with a major in journalism and double minor in theater and speech communication, Sublett put her skills to work at several Texas newspapers – the Victoria Advocate, Huntsville Item and Tyler Morning Telegraph.

“As a copy editor in Victoria, I learned more about how reporters work and the importance of deadlines. On Sept. 11, 2001, we put together a special section that was printed by late afternoon. Victoria had a lot of people who still depended on newspapers to get their information, and we had a big veteran community who were being called to service,” she said.

Sublett worked in Huntsville for more than six years as city editor and interim managing editor. She bore witness to

Nominees set for APA board of directors annual election

This is the first of three required publications of the nominees to fill vacant seats on the APA Board of Directors.

The nominees were chosen in March by the nominating committee and validated by the Board of Directors at its annual spring meeting last week at the APA Headquarters in Little Rock. The nominating committee is comprised of the immediate past president, one sitting APA Board member, and two at large members. Those roles were filled this year by Nat Lea, Ellen Kreth, Britt Talent and Teresa Hicks. The nominees include:

- Kelly Freudensprung of Benton, publisher of The Saline Courier
- Crystal Costa of Fort Smith, publisher of the Times Record
- John Robert Schirmer of Nashville, publisher/editor of the Nashville News-Leader

These three candidates along with four others will appear on the ballot in APA’s annual election to be held in May. The first publication of the nominees opens a two-week window for at-large nominations. A letter of recommendation from three APA newspapers in good standing is required for an at-large nomination. That period will expire on April 26. Designated voter letters will be mailed later this month, and the ballots for the annual APA election will be mailed in mid-May. The newly elected APA board members will assume their respective seats on the board at the conclusion of the annual APA SuperConvention to be held on June 27-30 in Eureka Springs.
Window for at-large nominations now open

The two-week window for at-large nominations to the APA Board of Directors opens today and runs through April 26, as per the APA constitution and bylaws.

Three APA members have been nominated by the nominating committee process and are published in a separate article in this week’s Arkansas Publisher Weekly.

Those wishing to nominate themselves or someone else for an at-large nomination and to be included on the annual ballot must acquire letters of recommendation from three APA member newspapers in good standing. These letters would need to be submitted to the APA by the April 26 deadline.

The ballots in the annual election will be mailed May 11.

Kelly Sublett
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several executions and discovered first-hand how government and the legal process work. She loved community journalism, including covering community theater events, school awards and the local Veterans Museum.

In Tyler she was the night desk editor at a larger, family-owned newspaper. Working noon to 2 a.m., she performed copy editor and story assignment roles while beginning to understand the hierarchy of newspaper publishing.

She took a break from journalism to work at Tyler Junior College in the Marketing Department overhauling a 42,000-page website. “This was around 2008, and I found out a lot about higher education as well as writing, editing, organizing and writing code,” Sublett said. “After a year and a half, the college asked me to study all I could about social media and the best way to use it for retention and recruiting prospective students.”

It was this social media expertise that brought Sublett back to Arkansas for a job at Arkansas Times, where she made lots of Arkansas connections and worked with small businesses on how to utilize social media. She left the Times to work in public information for the Department of Veterans Affairs. A little over three years ago, Zach Ahrens asked her to join the Log Cabin staff.

Today Sublett is using her experiences in editorial, digital, marketing and sales to implement a strategic plan that works in Conway and searching for ways to facilitate regional news. One innovation is a new publication, the North Metro Business Journal, which will be published for the second time in mid-April.

She is married to Conway native Cody Sublett, and they have two children. Conway has become a hub for her extended family, too, since her parents moved there from Burnet after they retired. Her niece and nephew both attend the University of Central Arkansas.

“I’m the first woman to have this position at the Log Cabin, and I’m fortunate to work closely with others in the GateHouse family,” Sublett said. “Being back in community journalism is really important to me. I have hope in our industry that there is greatness to come.”

Free Arkansas FOI handbooks available from APA office


The handbook includes the complete text of the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act, a list of resources on FOI, frequently asked questions, exceptions to the act and related federal acts. Instructions on how to challenge a meeting that is about to be closed can be found on the back cover.

For a free copy, email Ashley Wimberley at ashley@arkansaspress.org or call the APA office at 501-374-1500.
Save the Date


The convention planning committee recently met onsite to outline the convention programming and events. It’s no doubt going to be a great one you won’t want to miss.

Mark Your Calendar

September 27-29, 2018
National Newspaper Association (NNA) 132nd Annual Convention & Trade Show, Waterside Marriott in Norfolk, Virginia

New incentive program rewards APA members uploading public notices

To strengthen the best defense against newspapers losing public notice revenue, Arkansas Press Association is starting an incentive program. Each quarter, the names of those who upload public notices to the APA website at www.pubличnnoticeads.com/ar/ 100 percent of the time will be entered into a drawing for a $50 Visa gift card. The first drawing will be in at the end of June.

“In addition to the incentives, several APA board members and staff members will be calling those not currently uploading to help them get set up,” said Ashley Wimberley, APA executive director. “If you need more information, contact Tracy McGraw at tearseheets@arkansaspress.org or call the APA office at 501-374-1500.”

During recent sessions of the Arkansas General Assembly, there have been bills that would remove public notices from newspapers and allow them to be posted on a government website. The best defense for newspapers is that Arkansas’s public notices are already posted online and at no cost to the government.

APA recognizes these 62 newspapers for uploading of public notices:

- Advance Monticellonian (Monticello)
- Arkansas Business (Little Rock)
- Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (Little Rock)
- Ashley County Ledger (Hamburg)
- Ashley News Observer (Crossett)
- Banner News (Magnolia)
- Batesville Daily Guard
- Beebe News
- Booneville Democrat
- Camden News
- Carroll County News (Midweek)
- Carroll County News (Weekend)
- Charleston Express
- Clay County Courier (Corning)
- Cleveland County Herald (Rison)
- Charleston Express
- The Courier (Russellville)
- Daily Citizen (Searcy)
- Daily Siftings Herald (Arkadelphia)
- DeQueen Bee
- Dumas Clarion
- Eagle Democrat (Warren)
- El Dorado News Times
- Glenwood Herald
- Greenwood Herald
- Harrison Daily Times
- Hope Star
- Hot Springs Village
- Johnson County Graphic (Clarksville)
- Madison County Record (Huntsville)
- Malvern Daily Record
- Melbourne Times
- Mena Star
- Murfreesboro Diamond
- Nashville News-Leader
- Nevada County Picayune (Prescott)
- Newport Independent
- Newton County Times (Jasper)
- North Little Rock Times
- Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (Fayetteville)
- Osceola Times
- Ozark Spectator
- Paragould Daily Press
- Paris Express
- Pine Bluff Commercial
- Pocahontas Star Herald
- Poinsett County Democrat (Trumann)
- Press Argus Courier (Van Buren)
- Salem News
- Saline Courier (Benton)
- Sheridan Headlight
- Stone County Leader (Mountain View)
- The Sun (Jonesboro)
- The Daily Record (Little Rock)
- The Times Dispatch (Walnut Ridge)
- Times-Record (Fort Smith)
- Times Herald (Forrest City)
- Town Crier (Manila)
- Van Buren County Democrat (Clinton)
- Villager Journal (Cherokee Village)
- Waldron News
- Wynne Progress

Need an updated APA press card?

New or updated press cards are available by emailing Bridget Clay at presscards@arkansaspress.org. Please have a newspaper owner, publisher or editor make contact confirming employment and the news role for the person requesting the card.
Newspapers protest Canada newsprint tariff
Struggling industry says levy of up to 30% hard to absorb

By Stephen Steed
Reprinted from the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

A robot moves a roll of newsprint into place Thursday at the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette printing plant in Little Rock.

The industry that buys ink by the barrel is contesting U.S. tariffs on Canadian newsprint, with Arkansas newspapers and others across the nation calling the tariffs a threat to business.

Through two decisions, on Jan. 9 and March 13, the U.S. Commerce Department has levied tariffs of up to 30 percent on newsprint manufactured in Canada.

Canadian mills supply about three-fourths of the $1.2 billion in newsprint used each year for newspapers, newspaper supplements, certain books and directories and writing paper in the United States. The Commerce Department said the Canadian newsprint-makers were being unfairly subsidized by the Canadian government and were “dumping” their product in the U.S. at prices below fair market value -- a claim denied by the Canadian mills.

Critics of the tariffs note they weren’t requested by the primary trade group for U.S. paper manufacturers, the American Forest and Paper Association, or by four of the five paper mills still producing newsprint in the United States.

A metric ton of newsprint, or 2,205 pounds, costs about $600 now. A 30 percent tariff would push the price up to $780.

Newspapers have experienced other dramatic increases in the price of newsprint. In 1995, newsprint jumped from $552 per metric ton in January to $675 in May. But those price increases came when the industry was healthier than today and were the result of normal supply and demand. Newspaper leaders are calling the tariff decision by the U.S. government shortsighted and unnecessary.

“These tariffs will also hurt our employees, because payroll is the only expense that is bigger than newsprint,” the editorial said. “To help offset the extra expense of paper, publishers will eliminate jobs. Make no mistake: These tariffs will cause layoffs across American newspapers, including this one.”

Arkansas newspapers have taken up the call.

“The additional cost for newsprint will add up to millions of dollars for the company’s operations,” the Southwest Times Record in Fort Smith said in an editorial published in January when the first round of tariffs was announced. “If fully implemented, the resulting hardship could lead to the loss of thousands of jobs in the newspaper industry.”

The Arkansas Press Association is rallying editors and publishers to the fight, hoping to have the tariffs reversed by either the Commerce Department, when it’s to make a final decision in August, or by the International Trade Commission, an independent, bipartisan federal agency that reviews such tariffs. If the duties are overturned, publishers would get rebates.

“This affects more than just newspapers themselves,” Ashley Wimberley, the association’s executive director, said. “Very few newspapers anywhere will be able to absorb these costs. Smaller newspapers especially will be hurt, and so will the communities and advertisers they serve.”

The association last week sent out a “guest editorial” from another trade group, the News Media Alliance, to its member newspapers, to rally subscribers and advertisers to the cause.

Canadian mills aren’t to blame, David Chavern, News Media Alliance’s president and chief executive officer, wrote. “Rather, newsprint 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,” he wrote. “Since

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2000, the demand for newsprint in North America has dropped by 75 percent.”

The full effect of the tariffs hasn’t yet been felt in Arkansas, several newspaper executives said last week.

John Bland, publisher of The Times Dispatch weekly in Walnut Ridge, had just stepped back into the office after delivering newspapers Wednesday morning to take a telephone call from the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

His paper, with a circulation of 2,900, is printed at the Jonesboro Sun, owned by Paxton Media Group of Paducah, Ky.

“I’ve gotten a warning that price increases will be on the way, though we don’t yet know how much,” said Bland, who’s the third generation of his family to run the newspaper, founded in 1910.

Any additional costs incurred by the printers in Jonesboro will be passed on to customers like Bland.

“It will make it that much tougher in an already challenging environment,” he said. “We’ve been lean and mean, as they call it, for some time now. As people retired, we haven’t replaced them, we’ve all absorbed more duties and done whatever it took to streamline.”

Lynn Hamilton, president of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, said the newspaper, like other large publications, buys newsprint 30 to 60 days ahead, using a formula based on industry averages, minus discounts for volume.

All Canadian newsprint-makers are increasing prices, regardless of the specific tariffs they’ve been saddled with, and American newsprint manufacturers are doing the same, he said.

Prices have been increasing steadily, even without the tariffs, he said, declining to give specific numbers for the newspaper. After payroll, printing is the newspaper’s biggest expense, he said.

“It adds more pressure to us, but we have no definite plans how to react,” Hamilton said. “But it’s certainly a challenge we don’t need right now.”

Tom White, publisher of the Advance-Monticellonian in Monticello, prints his newspaper and seven other small publications.

The cost of newsprint is up 23 percent since July, said White, who is the incoming president of the Arkansas Press Association.

“That’s not directly due to tariffs, but rather because of all the talk leading up to the tariffs,” he said. “What concerns me more right now is availability. I’ve talked to people who’ve spent decades in the business, and they’ve never seen a market this tight.

“We’ve seen a lot of consolidation in the paper [manufacturing] industry. We’ve seen a lot of mills shut down, too, which reduces supplies. The tariffs are just another part of the puzzle, but they’re happening at a time when the effect will be even more dramatic.”

White offered numbers that put the dispute -- and the challenge facing newspapers -- into perspective, comparing print costs from last July with projected costs this May.

A weekly newspaper with a press run of 1,500 copies of 12 pages uses 225 pounds of newsprint, or about 10 percent of a metric-ton roll. Based on his current contacts for newsprint, such a newspaper will see its printing costs rise from $311.92 per weekly run to $335.80, with newsprint costs rising from 29 percent of the total bill to 33 percent.

A daily newspaper with a press run of 25,000 copies of 24 pages -- using 5,896 pounds of newsprint -- will see a $617 increase in daily printing costs, from about $3,748 to $4,366 per edition. The cost of newsprint, as a percentage of total printing costs, would increase from 55 percent to 68 percent for that newspaper, he said.

“The increasing costs will have a larger impact on a larger newspaper but, in most circumstances, the smaller papers in the state are operating on a much tighter budget,” White said. “Even a small increase could make the difference in a community paper’s success.”

Larger daily papers, though, likely will be hit hardest, he said.

“Even though the larger papers may have capital and be able to weather the price increases, they have also been hit much harder by the downturn in national advertising, so they may have a difficult time with any increase in printing cost,” White said.

At 20, Hayden Taylor is one of the nation’s youngest newspaper publishers.

He bought the Central Delta Argus-Sun in Brinkley in December 2016, garnering worldwide attention, and restarted it as the Monroe County Herald, with a circulation of about 1,500.

With just three people on the payroll, including Taylor, the Herald’s biggest expense is printing, he said.

“We can’t just try to take more money out of our advertisers’ pockets,” Taylor said. “As of now, we don’t charge for obituaries. We might have to look at that. We’ll need to beat the bushes more to get our subscriptions up. We’ll need to talk to our larger advertisers, like Kroger or Food Giant, and maybe get more inserts.”

He has no regrets about getting into the newspaper business.

“It’s worthwhile, so I’ll stick with it,” he said. “But I won’t be buying a Porsche anytime soon.”