

Editor starts job at Leader-Telegram

Milner covered many beats, campaigns in Iowa

BY ANDREW DOWD

LEADER-TELEGRAM STAFF

EAU CLAIRE — Bringing two decades of journalism experience at other Midwestern daily newspapers, Matt Milner began serving as the Leader-Telegram's new editor last week.

Born in Dallas, Texas, and raised in St. Louis, Milner previously worked at daily papers in Iowa and Missouri.

Prior to his new move to Eau Claire, Milner worked at the Ottumwa Courier in Ottumwa, Iowa, since 2002.

Starting as a staff reporter there, he reported on a variety of topics and beats, including coverage of presidential campaigns as

they courted voters in the crucial Iowa caucuses.

"You know that for a year ahead of them you're going to start seeing candidates come through," Milner said.

Among his memories of those years were a one-on-one chat with Barack Obama in the RV the future president used to tour the state during campaigns and seeing candidate Donald Trump bring in a crowd of 2,000 — a group seldom seen at a political rally in Ottumwa.

"The Iowa caucuses are exhausting, but a lot of fun," Milner said.

While he started as a staff writer, Milner became digital content editor for the Ottumwa Courier and area newspapers affiliated with it in 2011. Then in 2016, he became managing editor of the Ottumwa Courier.

When he saw the job posting for the leadership position at the Leader-Tele-

gram, it caught his eye as an opportunity to move to a larger area and publication.

Ottumwa, located in southeastern Iowa, has a population of about 25,000 while Eau Claire has 68,800 residents in the latest U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

As for his plans for guiding the Leader-Telegram's newsroom, Milner said his No. 1 task will be continuing the newspaper's track record for quality reporting that has won it many Wisconsin Newspaper Association awards.

"The biggest thing is trying to continue the success the Leader-Telegram has already had," he said.

But that doesn't mean there won't be any changes. Milner said he wants the paper to be more aggressive on publishing

stories on LeaderTelegram.com when they're ready, as opposed to holding off on their release until the printed paper is about to arrive at peoples' homes. He views this as rewarding subscribers who put their trust in the paper — be it through buying the print edition or paying for access to articles on the website — evenly.

Milner also plans to establish an editorial board comprised of area residents that would regularly meet to share their opinions on issues affecting the Chipewa Valley.

One of Milner's first duties is shifting the Leader-Telegram from publishing every day down to five days a week. Today is the final Sunday edition, and the newspaper will now publish on Mondays through Fridays. The



Milner

change is being done to trim production costs while the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to revenue cuts throughout the industry.

"It's unquestionably a challenging time for newspapers," Milner said. "But those challenges can be met."

After his son graduates from Ottumwa High School next year, Milner's wife of 21 years will join him in Eau Claire and spend their time as empty nesters by getting to know the city.

Milner's first impressions of Eau Claire are that it is a growing community with energy, potential and a "funky vibe to it," based on the new developments and public artwork he's noticed on his commutes to work.

"You can tell that this city has ambitions and drive to it," he said.

Milner graduated in 2000 from Central Methodist College in Fayette, Mo.

(now known as Central Methodist University) with a bachelor's degree in history with an English minor. While in college, he worked at the student newspaper, The Collegian. After graduating, he started his professional career at the Boonville Daily News in Boonville, Mo., working as a reporter, then becoming the paper's editor, before he moved to Iowa.

The Leader-Telegram's prior editor, Gary Johnson, left the position on June 26 to take a job as university relations specialist at UW-Eau Claire. Johnson had worked for the Leader-Telegram for 34 years, the past four as its editor.

Between Johnson departing in late June and Milner starting the job on Monday, the Leader-Telegram's assistant editor, Liam Marlaire, led the newsroom in an interim capacity.