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Kwallek was a jack-of- all-trades for Herald

Earlier this month, a person who had her name on the pages of the Grant County Herald Independent in some form for five decades left this world, leaving a legacy in the community in many ways.

Pat Kwallek, who started working for the Grant County Independent in the 1950s, continued on after it merged with the Grant County Herald, and was part of the newspaper through the mid 1980s. She passed away in December.

“Pat knew generations of families and could tell you about not just about the students in the photos, she could tell you about mom and dad and grandma and grandpa. That connection to the people in the community is invaluable to a small town newspaper,” said publisher John Ingebritsen, who worked as a reporter for Pat during his first two years. “She could really tell a story and would write long, interesting in-depth features. She was also the fastest one-finger typist I have ever seen.”

During her time with the newspaper, Kwallek’s position evolved from being a contributor to becoming editor, and being involved with many aspects of the newspaper.

One person who knew Kwallek very well is former Herald Independent Publisher Cal Lambert, who ‘inherited’ Pat when he purchased the newspaper in 1963. “Pat was an invaluable employee and friend and one of the most intelligent people I ever knew,” Lambert reflected.

At that time, Kwallek had a column, “Woods and Water,” that she wrote from home. The newseditor at the time, Bob Haskins, stayed with the newspaper for the first three years after Lambert bought the publication, but when he moved on, Lambert found it difficult filling the post, seeing a succession of college graduates who didn’t work out.

“(They) couldn’t spell ‘spit’ and they didn’t know the town,” Lambert quipped. Lambert turned to Kwallek. “Almost in desperation, as I had gotten to know her and her husband, Al, pretty well by that time, I asked her to take the job full time,” Lambert recalled. “Begged, actually,” he said, noting getting her to take the job was “one of my few great strokes of genius.”

Lambert remarked that Pat brought common sense to the post, an unflappable spirit, and the “absolute ability to produce good copy (often under duress).”

This was the community she grew up in, so she “knew everyone in town and they knew her.”

But it was more than knowing the community, Pat could write on any subject, and in a smalltown newspaper was asked to do so on a weekly basis. Lambert reflected she would write about high school sports, split school board and city council coverage with him, write feature stories, and still continued her column.

She not only had to write, but capture the moment with photography as well. The stalwart car crash photographer, she was even enlisted by law enforcement to document the scene of an accident, since she was already there covering it for the newspaper.

Lambert remarked she worked all hours, whatever was needed to get the story. “Pat was better than any ‘right-hand-man’ I could ever have had, and was a mainstay for nearly 20 years (that he owned the Herald Independent),” Cal said of her, wanting to note his thanks for all that she did.

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After she left the newspaper, she was not off the pages. Part of the Lancaster Area Chamber of Commerce, Kwallek continued on with a column for the chamber newsletter pages for many years.

In her role as a Chamber Ambassador, Pat got to work with her granddaughter, Amy Bell Kwallek, who was chamber director. That gave the younger Kwallek a new perspective on her grandmother's dedication to the community.

"From a very young age, my grandmother was a steward of Lancaster serving the community in a multitude of ways," Amy said. "She used her voice and her talents for several volunteer organizations and at the Herald Independent.

"When I returned to Lancaster to work at the Chamber, it was a real blessing to have her there as part of the ambassadors. She loved learning about all of Lancaster's businesses and the people who run them. She was well read, well written, and well spoken and was an excellent role model for her grandchildren," she continued. "I believe she made a lasting impact on the community and everyone she touched.

Kwallek's family is planning to have a proper recognition of her passing and life sometime next spring.