



Delavan, Sharon Reporter

Saying good bye to a friend

Former editor, publisher of *The Beacon* dies

By Tracy Ouellette
STAFF WRITER

Dennis West, the former editor and publisher of *The Beacon* died Jan. 26, at the age of 79.

West purchased *The Beacon* in the early 1990s and became well known in the area for his every-other week, general-interest newspaper in Williams Bay.

West was a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, earning a degree in journalism.

He was born in Rockford, Illinois, and his family owned a cottage in “The Bay” from 1928 to 1953 when it was sold.

“We continued to rent cottages for at least one week during most of the summer of my childhood and teenage years. Some years after we married, Kathi and I bought a piece of property across the street from the old homestead and eventually built a small house,” West recalled in the introduction to his book, “Westwords – Observations from the Desk of a Small-Town Newspaper Publisher.”



Dennis West

West worked in media – radio, newspaper and advertising – throughout his career. He was an award-winning journalist, recognized by the Associated Press, United Press International, Illinois Broadcasters Association and other organizations.

After earning his degree, he took a job at *The Bay Times* and a couple of years later, purchased *The Beacon*.

In October of 2017, West sold *The Beacon* to Southern Lakes Newspapers and he and long-time assistant, Wendy Shafer, joined the newsgroup, which also owns the Burlington Standard Press, Elkhorn Independent and Delavan Enterprise, among other local, weekly newspapers.

Shafer, who joined West at *The Beacon* in 2005, said losing her friend and coworker has been difficult, but her fond memories are softening the blow.

“I worked with Dennis at *The Beacon* for over 13 years. I enjoyed every minute of it. It was a fun, relaxed, creative atmosphere, with kids, cats, and dogs around the office. We laughed a lot. I will miss talking to him. He was a good writer and a good man, with a wicked sense of humor. I will miss him,” Shafer said. She recalled how West and his



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Dennis West (second from right) with his son, Mark (second from left), and Mark's sons, Ethan (left) and Miles.

wife always ran a Lakeland School prom section and Dennis and Kathi would go over on prom night and take pictures of all the couples, the king and queen and the court.

“It was a big deal to those kids,” Shafer said.

His love of the community showed in each edition of this newspaper.

“Dennis had the innate ability to find an interesting angle in every story. His folksy writing style and ability to connect with the community made *The Beacon* a familiar friend for his readers. Community journalism just isn't the same without people like

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Dennis,” said Ed Nadolski, editor in chief of Southern Lakes Newspapers.

West took pride in his writing and connection to the community, Shafer said.

“And being honest, he was honest to a fault. And what a sense of humor; he was so funny. We laughed so much in the office,” she added.

Yes, West was a funny guy. He could find the humor in any situation, sometimes to his detriment.

Shafer recalled that West would write satire news stories for this paper under the byline of “Frankly Facetious” and more than once, he was taken seriously.

Shafer said one instance

was when West wrote that the abandoned dog track in Delavan would be turned into a prison.

“They thought it was real,” she said. “We had to point out the byline.”

All of which, West found hilarious, she added.

“He never took life too seriously,” Shafer said. “And

if someone would get really mad, he would tell them they were welcome to cancel their subscription. A subscription to a free newspaper.”

Dennis shared his sense of humor in his Westwords column which appeared in *The Beacon* until October of last year, when he decided to step back from the newspaper.

After he sold the paper to Southern Lakes, West had continued to be the editor until February 2020. At that time, he was battling cancer and he gave up his editing duties, but still stayed involved with some promotion/advertising and writing his bi-weekly column.

Last fall, West left the newspaper completely while he continued to fight the cancer that was taking its toll. He told me it was time for him to go and he was comfortable leaving *The Beacon* in “good hands” and thanked me.

West is survived by his wife, sons Mark and Paul; grandsons, Ethan and Miles; brother, Mark; sister, Martha West-Edwards; and nephew, Jason Blake.

Rest in peace, Dennis, you will be missed by many.



SUBMITTED PHOTO Times/Reporter

Dennis West and his wife, Kathi, enjoy some time outside.