



Robert Tabern of Barron is the new editor for the Inter-County Leader.
- *Special photo*

Robert Tabern is new Leader editor

Brings two decades of experience and a passion for journalism

NORTHWEST WISCONSIN - Robert Tabern has been chosen to be the new editor of the Inter-County Leader, the sixth editor in the 90-year history of the newspaper which is published by the Inter-County Cooperative Publishing Association and serves Burnett, Washburn, Polk and Barron counties.

He will be working alongside retiring editor Gary King during a transition period over the next few months.

"Robert's experience and skills will bring the Leader to a new level of excellence in both print and online journalism," King noted. "It's been a pleasure to meet him and work with him."

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Raised in the northern suburbs of Chicago – Skokie, Morton Grove and Northbrook – Tabern discovered a passion for journalism during his time at Glenbrook North High School. He occasionally wrote articles for the school newspaper, “The Torch,” as well as hosted a weekly show on the school’s radio stations, WMWA-FM and WGBK-FM. He also hosted a live variety show for two years on a local cable access television station.

Tabern credits many early influences for fueling his passion for the news business at a young age, including his parents, Thomas and Rita, stepmother Beverly, stepsister Jennifer, high school broadcasting instructors Vince Pinelli and Peg Holecek, and friend Alexander Rubinow. He was chosen as a Top Ten High School Reporter by Chicago’s legendary WBBM-AM in both 1995 and 1996. He is also proud to have represented the community at the American Legion’s Premier Illinois Boys State.

Knowing journalism would be his chosen profession, Tabern moved to Jonesboro, Arkansas, in 1997 to attend Arkansas State University. While going to classes full time, he also worked on-air and behind the scenes at radio stations KASU-FM (NPR), KDRS-AM, and KLQZ-FM. Tabern also served as an assistant producer/weekend news producer for three years at KAIT-TV, the ABC affiliate serving portions of Arkansas, Missouri and Tennessee. Tabern’s first exposure to working a story of national attention came on March 24, 1998, as he was one of the first reporters on-scene at the Westside Middle School shooting.

At just 18 years old, Tabern had the opportunity to work alongside such familiar faces as Ted Koppel and John Seigenthaler to produce a series of reports for CNN “Newsource” and ABC’s “Nightline” and “World News Tonight.” While in Arkansas, he also produced local coverage of many tornado and severe-weather outbreaks, preparations for the arrival of Y2K, and the Sept. 11 terror attacks. Some of his college mentors included professors Richard Carvell, Mike Doyle and Dr. Mary Jackson-Pitts. Tabern graduated from Arkansas State University in December 2001, earning a Bachelor of Science in radio-television broadcast



Kandace Tabern, left, and Robert Tabern, right, pose for a photograph with the former Milwaukee Road lounge car “Cedar Rapids.” The Taberns chartered this car from the Friends of the 261, based in Minneapolis, Minn., for their wedding reception in October 2012.

journalism and minor in political science.

After completing college, he worked in various media and communication positions closer to the Chicago-land area, where his parents still reside. This included news producing and reporting for WKJG-TV, the then-NBC station in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and almost seven years as senior news/web producer at WDJT-TV, Milwaukee’s CBS affiliate. Tabern also wrote and developed media logs for the city of Oak Creek police and fire departments for almost four years. He vividly remembers working the day of the deadly mass shooting at the city’s Sikh temple, which occurred 10 years ago this week. Tabern also served as assignment editor at WTMJ-TV, the NBC station in Mil-



Robert Tabern, left, poses with then “Nightline” anchor Ted Koppel in 1998 while working for KAIT, the ABC-TV station in Jonesboro, Ark.



Come on down! Robert Tabern, right, poses with then “Price is Right” host Bob Barker, left, at CBS Television City in Hollywood, Calif., in August 2005. Robert got to attend special promotional tapings for affiliate employees. - Special photos

waukee from 2013 to 2015. Duties there included not only writing news stories, but also managing a staff of more than two dozen news reporters, photographers, multimedia journalists, engineers, live truck operators, and yes – even two helicopter pilots.

In more recent years, Tabern pursued jobs following his other interest – travel. For nearly four years, he served as operations coordinator for a tour company in Elm Grove called Country Travel DISCOVERIES. He designed and managed numerous domestic bus and rail tours to off-the-beaten-path places such as West Virginia, North Dakota and Nebraska. Besides deciding where groups would stop, Tabern led many tour groups himself, in addition to developing promotional and advertising pieces.

Interest in railroad history

It was Tabern’s interest in railroad history that brought him here to Northwest Wisconsin. He served as director of passenger development for the Wisconsin Great Northern in Trego for the past 2-1/2 years. Most of his focus at the tourist railroad was promoting the Mark Twain Zephyr, a historic 1935 CB&Q passenger train undergoing restoration. He co-authored a three-volume book series about the train, in addition to hosting/producing hundreds of on-line videos. He also designed dozens of posters located in the depot and in a museum train car.

Tabern and his wife, Kandace, call Barron County home. The couple were each other’s first loves, meeting nearly 25 years ago as college freshmen. After dating for about one year, the two broke up and didn’t speak for 12 years. They ultimately reconnected in 2011 and married the following year. They will be celebrating their 10th anniversary in just a few months with a visit to New York City. He and Kandace wrote and published more than a dozen Amtrak railroad route guidebooks, e-books and podcasts together. They also founded and currently serve on the board of directors of the Midwest Rail Rangers, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization providing on-board educational talks aboard various trains, including the South Shore Line from Chicago to South Bend, Indiana, through the Indiana Dunes. They also

enjoy traveling and being “on the go” as much as possible. According to the National Park Travelers Club, they are two of just about 20 documented travelers who visited all 423 units of the National Park Service – which include visits to Hawaii, Alaska, American Samoa, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and Guam. Next up ... a little less lofty goal of experiencing every state park in Wisconsin and Minnesota!

Opportunity

Tabern looks forward to serving as the newest editor of the Leader.

“This truly is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” he said. “The history of the paper – especially being founded in the midst of the Great Depression by farm groups and being Wisconsin’s only cooperative-owned newspaper – is amazing. I look forward to working closely with the outstanding leadership of ICCPA’s board of directors and President Richard Lee to put my two decades of journalism experience to work for our readers. I am also excited to spend the next three months working hand-in-hand with the current editor to learn from his years of experience. In the weeks ahead, we will be visiting local communities and I hope to meet key officials and contacts. One of my goals is to enhance both the website and app for the Leader. Having a strong background in video production and video editing ... we hope our subscribers will enjoy what is to come.”

“I feel the Inter-County Leader is extremely important to everyone in Burnett, Polk, Washburn and Barron counties and should be supported. If you think about it, the newspaper serves as the news lifeline for many people in communities around here where the nearest television news outlet is literally over 70 or 80 miles away. Over 360 small-town newspapers across the United States have closed since the start of the pandemic ... and we do not want that to ever happen here. I will put every ounce of energy I have into continuing to make the Leader continue to be what the front page says – Northwest Wisconsin’s News Leader.”