



Burlington Standard Press

# Handing off the pencils and the red pens

## Long-time editor-in-chief Nadolski retires

By Jennifer Eisenbart  
STAFF WRITER

To get an indication of the dedication that Southern Lakes Newspapers Editor-in-Chief Ed Nadolski has to community journalism, one need only look at Snowmagedon 2011.

The Groundhog’s Day storm dumped anywhere from 3 to 5 feet of snow on almost all of southeast Wisconsin, closed down both air and vehicle traffic and turned into its own meme generator around not only Wisconsin, but the Midwest.

But less than four hours after the snow had stopped, Nadolski realized that he and his news reporter Mark Dudzik needed to get a paper out the door – even if he and Dudzik could barely get out the front door of Nadolski’s home.

The two took turns breaking a path in the snow out to Milwaukee Avenue, then walked the mile to the SLN offices, then on North Pine Street. The two, along with graphic designer Sherry Gordon, were the only three able to make it into the office.

“It was just lucky that Sherry and I and Mark were there,” Nadolski said, not even addressing the fact that most newspapers simply would



Ed Nadolski

have delayed production.

That kind of dedication to his job – and to the Burlington community – served Nadolski well for more than 20 years, through breaking news and controversial

topics, through staff and print journalism changes.

Nadolski bid journalism farewell Jan. 27, retiring and handing off the editor-in-chief mantle of SLN to Tracy Ouellette, community and special sections editor for the company.

“Ed’s unwavering commitment to quality journalism has kept our group of weekly newspapers among the best in the state,” said Sue Z. Lange, general manager of Southern Lakes Newspapers. “We are fortunate to have had his leadership and professionalism throughout these past 23 years.”

Added Jack Cruger, the owner of SLN, “Ed is a talented editor who launched the careers of untold journalists. I am grateful that he led our news operations over 20 years.”



SUBMITTED PHOTO Southern Lakes Newspapers

**Southern Lakes Newspapers Editor-in-Chief Ed Nadolski holds up a page proof during his time at the company. Nadolski, after 20-plus years in the position, retired Jan. 27.**

### A community fixture

Nadolski came to the Burlington community from Ozaukee, where he worked for the Ozaukee Press from the 1980s forward. He started as a general assignment reporter, then graduated to sports editor and eventually co-managing editor.

In 2000, the Branen family – which made the Standard Press a fixture in the community – was getting ready to step back from direct control of the paper with the retirement of Bob Branen. His brother,

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• **Nadolski** (Continued from front page)

Shad, took over as CEO and worked to find a proper replacement.

"He was looking to exit and I was involved with our cable operation," Shad remembered, adding that the family found itself looking toward another successful operation for a new editor in chief – the Ozaukee Press.

"We were looking at assembling a new team. If you're improving your product, why not reach out to someone that's had success?" Shad explained, adding that at the time, he was hoping that the City of Burlington had enough to offer Nadolski.

Nadolski said he'd begun floating resumes, looking for an opportunity to fully lead a newspaper. Contrary to Shad Branen's worries, though, Burlington was a good fit for his then-growing family.

"Burlington is very similar

to Port Washington," explained Nadolski. "A very tight, small town. We came here and looked around and liked what we saw."

As for Shad Branen, it's a decision he's never looked back from.

"It's been one of the best decisions that I've been involved with," Shad said about the Nadolski hire. "He's been a tremendous force in the community. We're so lucky for him to be a part of Burlington."

**Covering the news**

Since coming Burlington, Nadolski has not lacked for work. The Branens sold the paper in the early 2000s, and Southern Lakes Newspapers began adding papers. While the Standard Press and the Elkhorn Independent remain the company's flagship papers, the publishing group is now

spread across Racine, Kenosha, Waukesha and Walworth counties.

While Nadolski provided guidance to the various community editors under his charge, though, the Burlington community remained his focus – both in the newsroom and outside of it.

In fact, the two were something of a blurred line. As most community editors will attest, it is a priority to be involved where you live. Nadolski is a member of the Burlington Rotary Club, as well as the Burlington Community Fund.

Those two groups helped give an insight into Burlington and its news. Outside of his role as editor, Nadolski played a part in several of the large decisions in the community. That included the building of Veterans Terrace and the reshaping of the Burlington community

pool – now the Burlington Community Aquatic Center.

He was also editor through all of the major news events of the 21st century at the paper. When Echo Lake Foods caught fire in January of 2013, Nadolski was one of the first on scene, his home just a few blocks away.

He also guided his staff through two high-profile drownings, another major fire – this time at Schuette Daniels Furniture Store in the downtown area – as well as numerous referendums with the school district and city.

The newspaper group has been recognized at the state level consistently through the Wisconsin Newspaper Association, winning general excellence awards as well as honoring Nadolski for his news and editorial writing. What struck those in the community most,

though, was that Nadolski treated all the news with the same importance.

"It doesn't have to be a major story," Shad Branen said. "He's at a level that we're just so fortunate to have in a community of this size."

"He had that impact because it hit home personally," he added of Nadolski's writing. "Just the human way he wrote."

City of Burlington Mayor Jeannie Hefty, meanwhile, came back to Burlington in 2013 after moving away just as Nadolski came into the area.

She considered herself fortunate to work with him.

"When I came back, I noticed his writing was very honest, and it just stayed to the subject," Hefty said. "What he was doing was capturing what Burlington was all about it."

"He's honest. His integrity is very high," she added. "I'm

just so honored I can call him a friend."

**Moving forward**

Nadolski might be retiring, but the newspaper group will remain in familiar hands.

Ouellette has been at Southern Lakes Newspapers since 2006, starting as an editorial assistant and working her way up to community editor and special sections editor.

His guidance is why she chose to stay in the field.

"Ed is the reason I'm editor in chief, now," Ouellette said. "His encouragement through the years and his willingness to let people grow in their job is what made him a great boss. He always, and I mean always, sees the very best in people. He has a desire to see others reach their potential. He wants people to succeed."

Nadolski, meanwhile, felt it was time to move on. He was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2008, and initially only given a few years to live. Now at close to 15 years post-diagnosis, he's ready to spend more time with family and in the community he calls home.

"I don't really have (plans), other than I'm going to be a grandfather," Nadolski said. "I'll slowly figure out what I want to do beyond that, whether it be freelance writing or something beyond that."

One thing is for certain, however – he's leaving with memories filtered through a lifetime of journalism, including 20-plus years in Burlington.

"I'm very proud of what we do as journalists," Nadolski said. "It gives us a chance to serve society in a way that allows (us) to improve their lives."

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