

# RICHLAND RAMBLINGS

By Matt Johnson

The Richland Observer had been without an editor for a year on the paper's masthead until last week.

Truth be told, the trio of DeEtte Thomas, Carolyn Miller and Erik Olson have been combining to fill that role. In light of high expectations about newspaper quality in this community, they have done a good job.

I've been given an opportunity, after 34 years of newspapering in southwest Wisconsin, to serve as the Observer's new editor. I'm grateful for that opportunity, but I want to step into it recognizing all that DeEtte, Carolyn, Erik and our advertising sales rep, Dave McGowan, have done to keep the newspaper viable in what has been a trying time for rural newspapers.

Since my name appeared on the editor's slot last week, I've been humbled by all of the kind welcoming comments I've received. This is far from my first rodeo at a newspaper that needs some TLC after being shorthanded for a while.

I grew up in Janesville, went to college at UW-Whitewater and began my writing career at the Daily Jefferson County Union in Fort Atkinson while still a student. I've worked at a handful of newspapers in southwest Wisconsin with a 15-year stint in Vernon County with the then "Broadcaster" and La Crosse Tribune. I was editor of the Fennimore Times for a total of 12 years in two stints. I published the Monroe Times for five years - that was my most recent stop. I've accumulated professional friendships humbly and happily. I like writing people's stories and am open to story ideas of all kinds from our readers.

I know improving the little things in the newspaper, from spelling, to punctuation followed by headline scaling and design characteristics will be crucial to helping people believe in positive change.

What this newspaper has going for it is a huge upside of serving a great community.

Richland Center is one of 72 county seats in Wisconsin and it's the primary center of population in this county of 17,000-plus residents. Richland County itself is a bit of an enigma, covering nearly 500 square miles, encompassing two school districts, but touching on another 10 more.

Depending on how people categorize themselves by population, what they feel they "belong" to could include a variety of answers from a city, village or town; the "Driftless;" the Wisconsin



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River; a school; farmland; or the simple answer - "Richland County, Wisconsin."

What this newspaper is going to work to do over time is provide more and more local news that readers can't get anywhere else except a local source. We want to cover Richland County and Richland Center. We're not going to forget about rural places, but if they're covered elsewhere, it's our duty to ensure our focus is on places that have no representation other than our pages or through local radio.

A newspaper's most important relationship is with the business community. Without support from businesses, there is no newspaper. Similarly, without support from readers, there is no newspaper.

While we work to foster a renewed commitment to our advertisers, we will also bring a focus back to human interest pieces in the newspaper. There has been call from our readers for more human interest stories, and we'll try to deliver more of them. Last week's story on Mary Deckert helping a young Ukrainian pianist is an example.

The paper will never be perfect or be any one thing that some reader wants it to be. Please know that what's happening on our pages and in the community are interwoven and require perspective. The news is not presented perfectly or instantly, as Walter Lippmann so famously stated, it instead is presented over time thanks to freedom of the press.

I'm politically pragmatic, something I think is missing these days is more statesmanship. I hope we reflect statesmanship on our pages. We hope for a representative mix of opinions that reflect the general makeup of Richland County and our readers.

Story ideas and letters can be sent to editor@richlandobserver.net



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