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Introduction to the Community Journalism Special Issue

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Introduction to the Community Journalism Special Issue

Whether we call it community or rural, small-town newspapers, radio, and to a lesser extent, television stations, are still out there pumping the news to a largely loyal following. What is "community journalism?" Wiki says "Community journalism is locally oriented, professional news coverage that typically focuses on city neighborhoods, individual suburbs or small towns, rather than metropolitan, state, national or world news." It goes on to note that these "Community newspapers, often but not always published weekly, also tend to cover subjects larger news media do not, such as students on the honor roll at the local high school, school sports, crimes such as vandalism, zoning issues and other details of community life. Sometimes dismissed as "chicken dinner" stories, such 'hyperlocal' coverage often plays a vital role in building and maintaining neighborhoods."

They also rarely get much attention from national media or academic researchers. For our part, the Online Journal of Research & Policy proudly offers three research articles addressing rural mass communication.

Drs. Cindy Price and Brown of the University of Wyoming present a series of interviews with owners of rural media outlets, and, from this conclude that these companies are struggling, but are in a good position to leverage their place in small communities in the future.

Dr. Mark L. Finney of Adams College examines the relationship between a small local newspaper and local government. In analyzing the coverage of a major health crisis in Alamosa, CO, he finds that the local newspaper extended more trust to the local officials than was the case with larger, out-of-town metropolitan papers. But, he also finds that the local paper offered far more coverage than the urban dailies.

Drs. Norman Sims, Bill Densmore, and Sara Majka of the University of Southern Maine offer us an inside view of what must be a rare phenomena: the creation of a new rural newspaper in a small New England community. The lessons learned and presented are crafted into a cautionary tale for any news organization that believes it can simply "cruise in neutral" without fear of competition.

These three articles provide us with an exceptional view of mass communication platforms that seems to be in far better shape economically than its big city kin.