

Color and strategy on the media beat



Philip
Dine

The outreach was modest in tone, a “free-lance writer” for the *Butler Eagle* (PA), requesting an interview about the Postal Service. While technically true, that turned out to be far from the real story. Rather than a newcomer hoping to compile clips and break into journalism, Eric Freehling had spent 40 years as a reporter/editor before retiring last year. Now with some leisure time, he had accepted an assignment for the newspaper’s “America250” series, which examines historical topics related to Butler County.

Small town of 13,000, small paper, but the nature of the story plus the reporter’s deep roots in the craft were appealing.

Region 12 NBA Brian Thompson reacted as I knew he would, carving out time on a busy day. For his part, Eric jumped at the chance to talk to Pennsylvania’s top letter carrier officer.

“It was very useful,” Eric told me an hour ago as I write this. “He gave me a personal perspective on the union position regarding the Postal Service. The story went very well.” And, he added, “The Butler connection was very unexpected.”

Brian was a postal clerk in Butler before switching to the carrier craft in a nearby town. His perspective: “The reporter couldn’t believe that I started my career in Butler. He seemed more energized as we were talking, because he was talking to somebody who came from the area....[and] knew about the *Butler Eagle*. And it was a neat experience talking with someone from a small paper. It’s nice to know that the small communities out there are interested in what’s going on with the Postal Service.”

Regular readers of this column frequently hear about the value of local journalism; this tale epitomizes that on multiple levels.

Getting the message out via TV involves a choice—network news reaches millions but can resonate less with local audiences who sometimes view it as distant and politicized. Meanwhile, local TV stations, while closer to home, reach far fewer people.

President Renfro recently found a way to get the best of both options by doing an interview at Headquarters with NBC’s division of 11 NBC-owned stations around the country, which constitute a small subset of the hundreds of NBC affiliates but are in top markets.

And so, his interview on the criminal targeting of letter carriers and the need to support federal legislation to combat it ran right here in Washington, DC, where lawmakers will deter-

mine its fate—and also was sent to the other 10 NBC-owned stations in New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, Miami, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego and a statewide station in Connecticut.

Talk about strategic efficiency.

Carolyn, retired from carrying mail in St. Louis and a Branch 343 member, reads this magazine closely: “I don’t just thumb through it. I read every page.” One thing she recently noticed was “about letting you guys know when the newspapers or TV get something wrong.”

Which is precisely what she did after reading in the *Arnold-Imperial Leader* the mayor’s reaction to a local post office closing because the lease expired: “They have had plenty of time to prepare for it, and they have failed. It is our tax dollars paying for it, and I am pretty frustrated about it.”

As a result, we got to tell editor Kim Robertson that USPS funds itself through earned revenue; she fixed it online and committed to “make sure to emphasize that when we do the next article.” We also were able to inform the mayor’s office.

Carolyn, thank you for a win-win-win.

Fresh from a successful rally in Las Vegas a couple of months ago, Branch 2502 President Paul Peterman amplified the message with an interview on Univision. Then, last week as I write this, Las Vegas NBC affiliate reporter Khalia Patterson, on deadline and armed with our contact info from her prior rally coverage, asked if we could provide someone to discuss safety issues given the heat wave. Paul, of course, agreed, and even managed to add member Staci Stowe’s voice to the interview. Two days ago, Paul provided the local National Public Radio outlet, preparing a report on the crime issue, with Mike Roksvold, a carrier who’d been robbed at gun point and was willing to help get the message out.

“If we can make it happen, we sure will,” Paul explained. “It’s important to get our message out to those who may not be familiar with our cause or what we’re trying to promote, especially when the carriers are getting assaulted.”

What these episodes have in common is that letter carriers—those mentioned and so many others among you—continue to deliver both the mail and the message.

EDITORIAL STAFF:
Director of Communications and Media Relations Philip Dine
Managing Editor Mike Shea
Writer/Editor Rick Hodges
Writer/Editor Jenessa Wagner
Editorial Assistant Sarah Eccleston

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