

Local Coverage Counts

JOE WINGERT, Publisher, Bucks County Herald

As the largest and only locally owned news media company in Bucks County, the Bucks County Herald is making an impact through its commitment to covering everything from local supervisor elections to high school sports and a covered bridge — all at the ground level.

When a local issue crops up outside the interest or capacity of larger regional news sources, community coverage shines a light on local decision-making. Pointing to a land development saga that played out along a fallow stretch of Route 202, Publisher Joe Wingert succinctly demonstrates the value of local coverage.

A controversial move by township officials to commission a study and purchase a tract of land for development, without public hearings, frustrated residents who eventually persuaded the township to change course. The Bucks County Herald covered the politics, the public response and the process.

Wingert maintains a fierce loyalty to all things local. He has formed community partnerships such as one with the League of Women Voters to provide in-depth coverage of local elections, ensure community engagement and encourage voting. The LWV provides content on elections, issues and related topics.

The Bucks County Herald manages this coverage through the newsroom and about three dozen freelance reporters/photographers. The paper relies on advertising revenue and a community-based journalism fund, and is exploring a nonprofit parent group to maintain coverage and its valuable role in the community. The evolution of the business model is a necessary step to continue the consolidation of the “big news” in upper and central Bucks County — news that matters to the people living in those communities.



“I’m a news junkie myself, but what you hear on the cable networks and even in the Philadelphia market is not at the ground level. You may hear everything happening in the governor’s race or federal elections, but not so much in the local contest.”

— Joe Wingert
Publisher, Bucks County Herald

The Pennsylvania Newspaper Industry Rises to the COVID-19 Challenge



- **Dropping Paywalls for Online COVID-19 Coverage Early in the Pandemic**
- **Coverage of Essential and Non-essential Business Closures**
- **Coverage of School, College and University Closures**
- **Coverage of Vaccine Rollout and Availability**
- **Coverage of Caseloads, Hospitalizations and Mortality Rates**

In March 2020, the coronavirus impacted the life of every Pennsylvanian. In fact, it would be hard to identify one person or sector of the economy that wasn't harmed by the pandemic. Shortly after lockdowns began in March, the newspaper industry experienced severe advertising revenue declines, staff layoffs and significant production challenges. Yet the state's newspapers kept moving forward, dropping their paywalls to give Pennsylvanians vital information about closures, COVID-19 case data and ways to stay safe during a public health crisis. Even with fewer staff members and less revenue, newspapers rose to the challenge and did more with less.

“We have been there for our community during the pandemic. But we’re never going to be more important to them than we are as we come out of this crisis, because there’s going to be a reconstruction. We’re going to have to help businesses. We’ve probably lost 20 businesses that just couldn’t survive this economic fallout. It’s going to be up to the newspaper to help bring these communities and companies back in partnership with the community. We’re just going to do everything we can to get everybody open and reach out to all of the 46,000 people who live in Huntingdon County to restart the local economy.”

— George “Scoop” Sample
CEO, The Sample News Group
Publisher, The Daily News

