

Call them the community ‘glue’

*Pennsylvania newspapers promote economic health,
trustworthy journalism, civic engagement in the places they call home*

Editor’s note: This article in observance of National Newspaper Week, Oct. 3-9, is from the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association, the official trade organization representing more than 350 print, digital and news media-related members across the commonwealth.

When COVID-19 descended upon Pennsylvania early in 2020, the fallout was swift and potentially devastating for a wide range of local businesses wanting to keep their doors open and hold on to employees and patrons.

LNP Media Group Inc. in Lancaster and Trib Total Media Inc. in Tarentum were quick to respond. The newspaper companies nestled in opposing southern quadrants of the state each developed advertising grant programs to help customers through the pandemic.

Their initiatives targeted the economic fallout of an unprecedented public health crisis in communities each has served for generations. Other business recovery-aimed efforts were replicated across the state by newspapers that were not only committed to publishing the life-saving news and information people needed to successfully navigate COVID, but also in keeping neighboring businesses like their own on track through the pandemic and beyond.

The grant program exemplifies a major reason Trib Chief Revenue Officer Matt Miller has made newspapers his life’s work.

“I believe so deeply,” he said, “about what we can do for the communities we live in.”

An economic report released this summer by the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association revealed that the state newspaper industry made an economic contribution of \$1.3 billion to the commonwealth in 2020 alone. The analysis also reported that Pennsylvania newspapers had a state and local tax impact of \$51.8 million last year.

The report estimates that Pennsylvania newspaper employees, who number almost 10,000 statewide, give nearly \$3.9 million annually in charitable donations. Their yearly volunteer time, which tops 100,000 hours, translates into another \$2.5 million to bring newspaper employees’ charitable impact to \$6.4 million.

Newspapers provide trusted news and information that individuals need to make decisions about their families, livelihoods and communities. They defend First Amendment freedoms and act as government watchdogs. They encourage civic involvement. They combat misinformation.

“We employ a lot of local people,” said Alexandra Henry, branding and communications manager for LNP. “We occupy a lot of local real estate. We are a verified, trusted resource. We provide our community a common understanding of the facts.”

Newspapers also have enduring relationships with the cities, boroughs, suburbs and rural areas that comprise their communities. These connections have been critical during the pandemic, and a reason LNP set aside \$500,000 to launch the Local Business Stimulus Program last year. Lancaster County-based businesses with qualified advertising and marketing plans were awarded a dollar-for-dollar grant from

LNP. An investment of \$600, for example, was matched by a \$600 LNP grant that brought the total advertising package to \$1,200. Awards ranged from \$250 to \$7,500.

“Finally, a positive in such a difficult time!” a grateful Betsy Small and Joe Samek, owners of a furniture repair and wood restoration business, told LNP.

So positive, that the LNP program, with an additional \$250,000, was renewed through the first quarter of 2021. About 80 local businesses benefited from the grants.

“The more successful our small businesses are, the more money will stay in the community,” Chris Stahl, director of client solutions for LNP Media Group, said.

Miller, along with Trib President and CEO Jennifer Bertetto, announced the Shop Local Marketing grants to southwestern Pennsylvania advertisers at the end of April 2020. “Getting the word out to customers that businesses are reopened will be crucial, but we realize advertising dollars may be scarce for companies facing so many other financial challenges,” Miller said at the time. “We hope these dollar-for-dollar grants will help ease a part of that burden.”

What started with \$250,000 in grant money quickly expanded to just over \$1 million. Miller said 192 businesses received the matching grants, which went as high as \$10,000. So great was the need that Trib decided to extend the program beyond the first quarter of 2021 – more than 300 businesses applied for more than \$2 million in grants -- to the end of the year.

Until the Shop Local Marketing grant, Amanda Kunkle said in a December 2020 TribLive.com article, advertising had temporarily stopped at the stair lift, ramp and elevator business where she works. “Being able to put our name out there more than normal helped other people in our community to see that we’re still open, we’re still running, and we’re doing it in the safest ways possible,” Kunkle said.

“We’ve injected \$3.2 million in grant money into businesses,” Miller said. When taking into consideration the kinds of unique initiatives newspapers statewide launched to help advertisers through the pandemic, the money is “staggering,” he added.

Trib Total Media, which is run by a trust and has diversified, operates two daily newspapers, the TribLive.com website, 11 weekly and five monthly community newspapers and a digital agency, 535media, in portions of Allegheny, Westmoreland, Armstrong and Butler counties.

LNP Media Group, operating under the Steinman Communications umbrella, operates its flagship newspaper and website, LNP | LancasterOnline; four weekly community newspapers; The Caucus, which reports on state government and politics; and the weekly Lancaster Farming, serving the mid-Atlantic region.

Miller regards newspapers as the “glue” that holds communities together.

“Beyond just the economic contribution,” he said, “I think there are so many other layers as to how the newspaper supports the community.”