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National Newspaper Week Op-ed

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Why local journalism matters

National Newspaper Week is Oct. 6-12

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I kick off every morning by checking the local and regional sports scores in a newsletter emailed to my smartphone by my hometown newspaper. I then scroll through a feed of breaking news.

This information matters to my family and me. It is a compilation of Pittsburgh-area news I cannot get anywhere else.

But it's not just about my relationship with local journalism. It is about yours.

While I'm filling up on the news of western Pennsylvania, Luzerne County residents are learning more about a home-rule charter and Philadelphians are reading about the death of a beloved Villanova law professor. At the same time, Altoona-area news consumers scan the local marriage licenses, absorb the news from the Friday night high school football games, and get details on the city's five-year, multimillion-dollar capital budget proposal.

It's a scenario repeated in Towanda, Waynesburg, Lancaster, Butler and communities across Pennsylvania every day.

The news so vital to the lives of all Pennsylvanians comes to us the way we want to get it -- via smartphones, laptops or in print – from the local newspapers and/or digital news outlets that know our communities best.

National Newspaper Week, celebrated this year from Oct. 6-12, reminds us of the pivotal role local journalism plays nationwide and, in our case, in the Pennsylvania communities where we pursue our livelihoods and rear our families.

Pennsylvanians like me expect, want and need local news coverage that will help us make informed decisions and improve the quality of our lives. In just the past week, more than 6 in 10 Pennsylvania adults read a print or digital newspaper or visited a newspaper website.

That is a big reason newspapers must continue to run public notices in print, as required by Pennsylvania law. Taking this role seriously, newspapers also publish notices on their websites, in front of paywalls, and in electronic editions for maximum transparency. The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association goes a step further to reach the largest number of residents by managing a statewide site, www.publicnoticepa.com, at no additional cost to taxpayers.

These public notices ensure that we can participate in the government decision-making process – think school closures, higher tax proposals and zoning changes – before government takes action.

News we get from local journalism makes our lives better by informing our decisions – when we cast a vote, make a purchase, try to avoid roadwork, or want to support a fire house fundraiser. Through local news media, we connect with one another over a shared interest in issues rooted in our neighboring back yards via investigative reports, letters to the editor, podcasts, videos and events such as community forums.

Local news media are essential to a robust Main Street economy. They hire our neighbors. They pay taxes. They and their employees donate money and volunteer hours within the boroughs, cities and townships they serve. They are watchdogs that champion transparent, accessible and accountable government. These news media outlets are trusted community members who connect people and their concerns.

In this and every election year, local news media outlets provide voters with the information they need to make decisions about the candidates who want their support. Journalists report on the issues affecting their readership, not to mention election basics such as how to register and where to find rides to the polls.

Local news media are at the root of our communities. They inform, connect and inspire us.

I believe that is something to celebrate, not only during National Newspaper Week, but every week of the year.

The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association is the official trade association representing print, digital and news media-related members statewide. PNA's mission is to advance the business interests of Pennsylvania news media organizations and promote a free and independent press. PNA is based in Harrisburg.