

# North Notes

## Spokane-North Rotary Club

January 13, 2024

- **Jan. 20:** No meeting. MLK Holiday.
- **Jan. 27:** Noon luncheon at the Bark. Speaker: TBA.

### Announcements:

- **Laura Zahn** and **Steve Boharski** reminded the group about the Jan. 24th work project at the Ronald McDonald House, 1028 W. Fifth. Tours are open after 3 p.m. and cooking for the dinner starts at 4 p.m., clean-up done by 7:30 p.m.
- **Jerry Logan** said if our group outgrows the Bark conference room, the Gonzaga student union may have a conference room for up to 50 which we could use for free. Buffet costs are \$11 for GU alumni and \$12 for others.
- A celebration of life for longtime Spokane-North Rotarian Bert “Bub” Belles is scheduled at 2 p.m., Jan. 25, at The Hangar Events Center, 6095 E. Rutter Ave.

### Happy Bucks:

- **Melinda Keberle** was happy to pass the Rotary grant process test. The club now has three participants who qualify for district and international grants plus a fourth grant coordinator.
- **Ron Noble** was happy that Bill Simer’s wife, Renee, was recovering from a fall.

## Hold the presses: S-R fights to keep papers alive

For decades, newspaper circulation in print editions has been diminished.

At the Jan. 13 luncheon, Rob Curley, Spokesman-Review executive editor, discussed the declining readership, especially among younger readers, and talked about ways the paper is trying to stem the downturn.

In a candid, engaging discussion, Curley described the problems.

“Gen X was the last age group to read newspapers,” he said, adding that circulation totals peaked in the 1970s and has been declining steeply since. In print editions, the S-R totals have declined from 135,000 a day then to 24,000 last fall.

Compounding the concerns, Curley said, with demise of advertisers like Macy’s, and the on-line competition for classified ads, the revenue model has flipped. Advertisers for decades counted on 80 percent of revenue, while circulation provided 20 percent, Curley said. Now circulation provides 80 percent and advertising just 20 percent.



One example hit home directly at the luncheon. Sheila Fritts said many of her clients at the Fairwoods Retirement Center cannot afford the higher circulation cost, so they pick up copies from the free weekly stacks of The Inlander to have papers to read.

Curley said he is “a 54-year old nerdy guy from Kansas” who is trying to make changes.

He said in Spokane he saw a community which may work with the changes.

Curley, who has worked at the Washington Post, as well as Kansas City and Los Angeles papers, said he looked for smaller cities which value community standards. He said he ruled out St. Joseph, Missouri, and Charleston, but thought Spokane might fit the model he has sought.

So eight years ago, Curley came to Spokane as editor and got involved, saying he visited all the Rotary meetings and any other groups he could find three or four times a week to learn about the city. (He visited our club in 2017.)

Curley said he and his wife were so enamored of the possibilities that they bought a house here, adding, “it was the first home we had since Kansas City, and we never want to leave here.”

Realistically, he said he knows the challenges of reaching younger readers.

“No high school in the city has a student newspaper,” Curley said, asking, “How do you fault them (for not reading a newspaper), when you can’t reach them?”

Curley established the monthly Northwest Passages program to get famous authors and others to attract attention. He said most crowds range from 200 to 700, adding some have reached 2,000.

He said his favorite program was at North Central’s auditorium, with eight or nine candidates for the 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional debate. “The first student asked about TikTok and no one what knew what that was.”

Now Curley recruits talented high school writers to write news stories. He said the S-R’s Olympia bureau writers are usually under age 25 – not counting Jim Camden, retired from the paper but still writing a weekly column.

The big challenge for newspapers, print or on-line, will be community funding, Curley said. He said newspapers in Salt Lake and Philadelphia, among others, are working toward non-profit methods to keep operations alive.

So far, Spokane has survived with print and on-line newspapers.

But Curley has also considered an alternative. He is founder and president of “Comma,” with an office near the Gonzaga University campus for a base of operations.

He said the “comma” in literature links one element to another – perhaps a model of linking one type of newspaper operation to another.

That would be a much better alternative which club member Jerry Logan mentioned as a closing punctuation – “Period.”

*Bulletin editors: Chuck Rehberg and Scott McKorkle. Photo by Laura Zahn.*

