

Media Driven By Business

by Patrick Lalley

Since time eternal, it seems, people in Sioux Falls have been complaining about the *Argus Leader*, our daily newspaper.

As the largest daily in South Dakota, the *Argus* should elicit a certain amount of attention from the populace. But mentioning the *Argus* anymore is about the easiest way to receive a sneer or half-hearted "hrumph" in conversation. The paper doesn't have the best of reputations.

However, with a few exceptions, the people who complain about news coverage generally have no particulars on why they think the *Argus* is the worst publication they have ever seen, other than how "liberal" they are. I have news for you: they aren't as far to the left as you might think.

There are some things to keep in mind when discussing the *Argus* and media in general. With the exception of the Public Broadcasting System, media is a business, a big business. This has been specially highlighted in the last few months.

Mike Monseur claims he was let go by KSFY because the ambulance story he had been pursuing for two years was costing the station advertising money.

KDLT discontinued their weekend newscasts, and cut their staff accordingly, to lower costs because of drops in advertising revenues.

The *Argus'* recent series on the Missouri River was spread out over five days rather than as a special section.

The war caused many sectors of the economy to tighten up the purse strings until the outcome was clear. That contributed to the recession, which we may or may not be pulling out of. One of the first places that business people look to save money is in advertising and promotion costs. This lowers ad revenues and ultimately contributes to the way you find out what is going on in the

world.

This is the system we have, and there don't seem to be any major changes coming for the future.

Businesses need to advertise to bring in business. The voting populace needs to be informed to make decisions on issues and topics that face us. We need the media to survive as a democracy. There is a balance that has been struck between what we want to know and what we should know. The *Argus* is the best example of that.

On the one hand, the daily has begun a new campaign to find out what the people want. The survey, called "News 2000", is supposed to help the staff point the paper in the right direction to the next century by asking their readers about subjects and issues that are important to them, as well as their leisure interests and reading habits.

On the other hand, there is the responsibility of a daily to tell the people things that aren't exactly what they want to hear: that people sleep in the streets, that people are sometimes homosexual, that we have problems with health care and substance abuse and teen sexuality. In effect, to tell us what is wrong with us. That is their responsibility, and it is neither easy or pleasant.

This is not to say that I think the boys and girls at 10th and Minnesota are doing a bang-up job. I think that as part of the Gannett chain of papers, they are overly influenced by the dollar and the bottom line, but that's my opinion.

At *Tempest* we will continue to discuss the media and its effect on our community, in our column "You and Media." Your comments, as always, are welcome, because media coverage is an issue and, like other issues, it needs to be discussed to establish what is best for the community as a whole. ■

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