



**Tom Riordan**  
Executive Editor

## Getting the motivational juices flowing

A newspaper editor can't motivate members of his or her staff.

He or she only can only create an environment for self-improvement — that elusive desire to reach excellence in producing better and more exciting products.

A couple of Thursdays ago, the editor and staff of this paper and those of the other 11 Observer & Eccentric newspapers participated in a six-hour seminar.

It was called a quality of product conference featuring four panel discussions. Seventy-five O&E editors, reporters, photographers and copy editors packed a large room in J Building on the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College.

**THE IMMEDIATE GOAL** was to gain more knowledge about the art of newspapering. And maybe start the juices of self-motivation flowing.

Before I tell you about that session, let me fill you in a bit on the O&E group.

I use the word "group" intentionally, not "chain." The latter brings up memories of the Hearst chain, which was run by the powerful William Randolph Hearst, who dictated editorial policy from California for his paper spread across the nation. In too many instances, this publisher had no feeling for the communities in which his papers were distributed.

The "chain" days are pretty well behind us — certainly they don't apply to the O&E.

Now it's true that the 12 Observer & Eccentric Newspapers do print stories from other O&E papers when the story overlaps communities. That goes for advertising, too. And can you blame a merchant for wanting to showcase his wares in two or four or all 12 of our newspapers with a combined circulation of 155,000?

**ON THE EDITORIAL** side, it's a policy of local control. Each of our 12 papers has its own editor and its own news staff. Their job is simple — cover the community as completely as possible, establish editorial opinion on local issues.

The motto of each O&E staff could well be, "We're never satisfied. We want to do the best reporting and writing, take the finest pictures, edit tightly and design sparkling-looking pages."

That's what prompted the recent quality of product conference.

Dealt with were news reporting, column and editorial writing, sports pages and the editing of copy — all basic stuff, but a news person can never get enough.

The panels were made up of three guests from the "outside world" and six O&E veterans, plus four in-house editor-moderators. The guests included



Harry Stapler, a star, rivaled by O&E's own Craig Piechura in quality of product session. (Staff photos)



Hillis Johnson, news editor of the 39,000-circulation daily Jackson Citizen Patriot; Lloyd Stoyer of the 20,000-circulation weekly Lapeer County Press; and Harry Stapler, founder of the East Lansing Town Courier.

**THE HIT OF THE DAY**, Stapler is a former Detroit News sports writer, one-time state sports editor for Associated Press and former publisher of the Town Courier group of East Lansing area weeklies, which he sold several years ago.

Stapler now runs the journalism program at Ferris State College, but he also travels around the country doing such things as make a study of "visuals and words" at the New York Times.

At the O&E panel, Stapler was masterful. He mainly dealt in sports coverage, for which he had brickbats and praise. Harry thinks a person writing sports should first be a reporter and then a sports writer.

"There are too many jocks covering sports," he said.

He gave us low grades in appeal of headlines and some of our writing. He said he has not seen a group of papers with better sports pictures. He said we are doing great on coverage of women's sports.

Stapler warned, "Criticism is good but can be carelessly done, particularly when dealing with high school athletes."

He concluded that O&E's greatest strength "is the ability to cover a great deal of sports in limited space."

**HERE ARE SOME COMMENTS** from other panelists:

Johnson: Use your daily competition as "legmen," find the holes in their stories, expand and

develop. What dailies print might only be part of the story.

Mary Connelly-Szczesny, assistant editor of the Birmingham-Bloomfield Eccentric: Use more than routine sources so you get more than routine results in straight news stories. Think about reaction of people to a happening. The role of the community newspaper is to amplify a critical situation.

Mike Scanlon, reporter for Garden City Observer: The more people you attempt to reach, the better and broader news story you will get.

John Bozzo, editor of the Redford Observer: Develop feature approach to writing sports stories, with a key play, an observation, an overheard comment. Try to avoid quoting high school athletes — generally they don't have much to say.

Tom Baer, sports editor for the Farmington Observer and West Bloomfield Eccentric: The last basketball game outdrew the community council meeting by 3-to-1 — and they paid to get into the game.

Tim Richard, editorial page director: After you have reported the facts, editorials start telling the truth. Get ideas by reading good literature — the Declaration of Independence is a "darn good editorial."

Stoyer: The editorial page should be at least the second or third best-read page of the entire newspaper. It should have some fun elements. Involve the readers — they like to feel part of the action. You are safer when people are "raising hell with you" than when they are agreeing with you. Besides, it helps your credibility.

Craig Piechura, reporter and columnist for the Southfield Eccentric: A columnist must first be a reporter. In columns, people want to be informed,

entertained, introduced to something new or with a different twist. Column ideas are limitless. You cover police and schools week after week and it gets tedious. Writing a column is a fringe benefit. And you can make long distance calls to places like San Francisco at company expense.

Dennis Rosenblum, copy editor: Take time to rewrite what needs rewriting. That is an indication of the care you have in the personal quality of your work. Our common problems include misspellings and bad grammar.

**WHEN THE SIX HOURS ENDED**, each person attending was given a questionnaire to rate the panels separately and the conference as a whole. Frank remarks were sought along with ideas for future sessions.

These comments really covered a broad spectrum.

Here's a sampling:

"Started slow, but finished strong."

"New writing was probably one of best discussions. Packed with insight."

"Harry Stapler was great. Would like to have heard him talk about the total paper rather than just sports. Perhaps he can come back."

"Needs to be an immediate follow up on Stapler's criticisms and attention to what we do well."

"Piechura's presentation was a column in itself."

"Would like more practical suggestions on how to do things. Step-by-step guide to accomplish the great things talked about."

"Great idea. I hope this is the first of many more seminars of this nature."

"Boring, too long, can't even remember much about it."

"Talking about quality makes people think about quality in their day-to-day work."

"I anticipated something worse."

"Good to have. We have much to give to each other. Helps recharge the batteries. Good balance of outside speakers and inside experts."

"Graphics and photojournalism would be topics of interest."

"Don't eliminate news writing panel."

"Seminar on layout, police reporting, headline writing, city budget reporting."

**BEST OF ALL** was the observation of one staff member. It sums up what conferences, workshops and seminars are all about. And self-motivation.

"It was refreshing to come together as a group and be reminded that we are all dedicated professionals trying to put out good newspapers. Too often we forget this in the daily flow of activity and routines."

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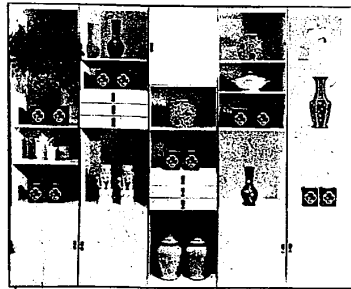
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