



Observer History: A Record Of Growth And Development

When Publisher Philip H. Power purchased the Observer Newspapers on December 31, 1965, the group consisted of weekly publications in six cities: Livonia, Plymouth, Redford Township, Garden City and Nankin Township, now Westland.

Since then, the group has increased publication to twice weekly, expanded circulation, included Southfield, and undergone major technological changes to keep step with the dynamic north-west suburban area it serves.

AT THE TIME of Power's initial purchase, the newspapers were set in traditional "hot" type, which involved melting lead, setting type on huge, noisy, inefficient linotype machines, and processing engravings for photographic reproduction. Most of the type had to be bought from outside suppliers, as was the letterpress printing, since the Observer organization lacked any production facilities of its own.

One of the first steps in streamlining the Observer operation took place in 1967, when the newspapers converted to offset type production. In contrast to "hot metal" letterpress, the "cold type" offset resulted in more flexibility of page style, cleaner type, and much sharper pictures.

At the same time, Power and his staff realized that once-a-week publication was inadequate to keep pace with the growing, developing communities the Observer organization served.

Accordingly, publication frequency of the Livonia, Plymouth, Farmington and Redford papers was increased to twice each week. When the group added Southfield to its circulation area, that paper was printed twice each week, too. Today, all Observer Newspapers, excepting those serving Westland and Garden City, are published twice each week, the better to serve the constant demand for up-to-date news in each community.

DURING THE PAST four years, Observer Newspapers, Inc. has incorporated with The Plymouth Mail, The Farmington Enterprise, and the Southfield News.

Both the Mail (now the Mail & Observer) and the Enterprise (now the Enterprise & Observer) were founded in the late 1800's and played integral roles in the history and development of their communities. Power fully realized their unique contributions, and strove to retain the concept of hometown newspapers while continuing plans for modernization and expansion.

In February 1970, The Southfield Observer was launched, and shortly thereafter was merged with The Southfield News, another distinguished local publication. Today The Southfield News & Observer continues the tradition of hometown journalism in this rapidly growing area of Oakland County.

DURING THE intervening years, much effort was devoted to internal development and modernization.

A photographic department was built, enabling development and printing of locally-taken pictures. A classified advertising office was added, and a computer was installed to set type and produce billing and accounting information.

Circulation was improved, with an extensive program of carrier boy recruitment and training, and a voluntary subscription plan was launched. Today advertisers enjoy saturation coverage of a rich market area, and more than 45% of the over 109,000 Observer families voluntarily pay their carrier boy each month.

Despite all these developments, Power and his staff decided the organization was shackled by old and inadequate buildings and an ineffective production system. Their concern to improve the quality of the newspapers led them to embark in 1968 on the decision to build an entirely new central facility, one of the first in the country ever specifically designed to meet the needs of a suburban newspaper group.

