

Industry Pioneers

The free-paper industry has a rich history. And, many people from the Midwest played an important role in its development and growth. The caring, sharing and support members offer each other make this an industry like no other. In this section we will share features from people past and present who helped create the unusual dynamic we enjoy today.

If you know of a person or company that should be featured, please contact Lee at director@mfcg.org

This month we are featuring Rudy and Gladys Van Drie.



Early Life of the Ames Advertiser Boone County Shopping News Knoxville Reminder

By Gladys Van Drie

Rudy Van Drie published his first issue of the Ames Advertiser in 1958. That same year we were married and I taught school to pay the mortgage on a duplex we had just purchased. In 1959 Rudy had become acquainted with Kay Fox, a Des Moines publisher, and Kay convinced him to attend the National Assn. of Advertising Publishers (NAAP) conference which was being held in Des Moines. After that conference Rudy was sold on the value of attending. The next year we again attended but could not afford the hotel rooms so we slept in the chairs of the lobby. I'm thinking that meeting was in Kansas City but my memory may be faulty. The following year Rudy had T-shirts printed that said, "My Daddy Publishes a Shopper." Those t-shirts paid for our trip. From then on we did not miss the annual meeting and our financial situation had improved. The value gained was new creative ideas, improved management skills, distribution methods, the monetary value of your papers etc. After a few years we purchased the Boone Iowa County Shopping News.

An important side benefit was the friendships we made. We met Dick and Sue Luzadder at a Florida conference. They had two girls the same age as ours and the friendship continues today. Dick and Sue Luzadder have passed away but I still exchange visits with her daughters and grandchildren.

Rudy and Dick decided to purchase the Knoxville Reminder together and the thought was to have board meetings in Florida in the winter and in Iowa during the summer. The paper was purchased late in the season so the first board meeting had to be in Iowa where the paper was located. We drove to Des Moines to pick them up at the airport during one of Iowa's famous terrible, blizzards. Dick was easy to spot as he came off the plane, walking through the snow in his bright yellow pants, silk shirt, and shiny white shoes. We laughed about that for years and immediately gave him a lesson on the subdued winter colors of the Midwest and the importance of proper footwear. Later so many Iowa shopper publishers and publishers from other states became good friends and contributed to our success.

In 1976 tragedy struck when Rudy died of a heart attack on the tennis courts. After teaching in early marriage, I was a stay-at-home Mom after our children were born. Sue Luzadder stayed with me for a week after the funeral and as she was departing to go back home, she looked at me and said, "Gladys Monday morning go to the office and pretend you know what you're doing." She had always been an equal partner in their operation. With two girls to put through college I decided to do as she had suggested. It also gave me a reason to get up and get going. After a month I made a list of my strengths and weaknesses and made the decision to hire strength where I was weak. I also had a meeting with all the employees and said that I planned to keep the paper but I would need their help. Rudy had a philosophy that he frequently shared, hire good people, train them, trust them, and get the heck out of their way. I'm proud to say the paper never skipped a beat. Much of that credit goes to the employees who were salt of the earth hard workers. They did whatever was needed to get the paper out. When a truck tipped over carrying all the papers the sales people, graphic artists, front desk people did what was needed to get the papers to the carriers. Another time we had a fire that started in the wall of our Boone building where all the work was done. The graphic artists drove to a neighboring paper to use their equipment to lay out our paper each week until recovery was completed.

I must add the help I received from the State and National organizations was invaluable. I learned so many things and received mentoring help from so many publishers. I hesitate to name them all because with my aging memory I will forget someone. All I know is I couldn't have done it without the support I received from these organization, publishers, and friends.

My last story is one I want to share about the kind of people that were involved in this business. It was the early years of publishing the Advertiser and we were struggling. Rudy was getting the paper printed at the Clarion Reminder and owed a large printing bill. He was ready to throw in the towel. Gene Allen, the publisher, said," Rudy I think you're so close to being successful I will carry your printing debt for some more time." It was after that the paper became profitable. That kind of helpfulness and cooperation exemplifies our industry.