

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.

This month our feature story is about Deb Weigel. You'll find her story and start in the business is as unique as she is! Happy reading!!

We would like to feature many more pioneers. Do you have someone in mind? If so, please reach out via email to director@mfcpc.org with the appropriate contact information. We'll take it from there!



Just Fake It!

By Deb Weigel

I guess you could say my career started back in 1973 when I was a senior in high school at Beckman in Dyersville. There was a co-op program where you could find a job, get out of school for an hour, and earn credits while working.

I worked at the Dyersville Commercial, a local newspaper that published weekly. I started out as a typesetter on a Compugraphic machine and basically just typed, typed, typed! To this day I love to just type on my computer!

I was also in charge of circulation and made all the address changes, etc. Back then I don't remember any promotions to get people to subscribe, because basically almost every household did.

Those were the days when ashtrays were all over the desks and smoke was heavy. There also might have been times when a glass of wine would be found in our top right desk drawer as well. And the days that when the paper went to press, everyone gathered at the corner bar to celebrate that another paper went out! Those were the days!

From there I traveled to Charles City to live with my older brother and sold advertising for the Charles City Press. That was short-lived as the love of my life, "Tiny", proposed to me and I moved back to Dyersville.

For the next 10 years, I took a break from the newspaper industry and worked at a high school and a LP gas company.

And then one day it happened.

A gentleman walked in and wanted to sell me an ad for the LP gas company in the Eastern Iowa Shopping News. We got to talking and I mentioned that I used to work in composition years ago while in high school. I didn't buy an ad but he returned the following week to ask me if I'd work for him. Astonished I told him I don't know anything about composition anymore and all the new technology that came with it. He said "that's ok, just fake it!"

He said he liked my personality and wanted me to be the comp manager and take over while the present manager was on vacation. Then when she returned, she would be working under me!!!! Now, what do you say to something like that????

Well, it just so happened that Tiny and I had just purchased an acreage about 3 miles outside of Edgewood where the Shopping News was located and Tiny had just taken a job in Edgewood. Sounded like an opportunity, so why not???

From the beginning, I was very honest with my employees and told them right up front I knew nothing about comp anymore and they would have to teach me. You can imagine the looks I got from them!

I have to tell you that old comp manager and her husband made my life hell for the first couple of months and I cried many nights wondering what the heck I was thinking taking this job? Thank heavens, she finally quit.

You might wonder what happened to the "just fake it" manager. Well, he got let go shortly after I arrived and they brought in a new female manager. We got along well. But after she got married and had to commute for awhile from Cedar Falls, she decided to quit because of the distance.

Well, guess who was named the next General Manager? Yup, me.

Now the Eastern Iowa Shopping News, a weekly shopper, was owned by Woodward Communications out of Dubuque. Being owned by a larger corporation surely had its benefits and the leadership at the time was second-to-none. I learned so much and made such great life-long friends. The company even financed my college education and I will be forever grateful. Gentlemen like Don Hanson, Craig Trongaard, and George Louthain all influenced me to be the best manager I could be.

It was after being the manager a couple of years, probably in the early 1990's, I started attending conferences put on by Shoppers Guides of Iowa (SGI), now Midwest Free Community Papers. These were phenomenal conferences where I met so many people in the industry who were willing to share their experiences with me. Friendships were built back then that I still have dear to my heart today.

It was after a couple of meetings that I was approached by Merle Been and Sid Blair asking me to be on the Board of SGI. I accepted and have been on the board of SGI and now MFCP ever since.

In 1999 Woodward bought the Dyersville Commercial and we closed our office in Edgewood and moved it to Dyersville. And guess what? To my surprise, there were 3 people I worked with in 1973 who were still working there!

During the early 2000's I was promoted to Vice President of the Weekly Division for Woodward and started working out of the home office in Dubuque. In 2008 I started working for Community Media Group and was publisher for the papers in Oelwein, Independence, Vinton and Waverly.

Fun fact...I ended up recruiting one of the people who was present on my first day at the Eastern Iowa Shopping News to join me years later as a member of the composition department in Oelwein. All these years later and I'm happy to say she is still a valued member of the Community Media Group award winning composition team!

I was also asked to be on the Board of the Iowa Newspaper Association and did so from 2012-2018. Retirement on June 1, 2022 is my reward for all the years of working alongside such wonderful people.

30+ years of being on the board of MFPC which will cease at the end of this year– has been an honor and privilege. This organization is one of the best things you can invest in. Please attend the conventions and make some of the best friends you will ever have, like I have done. I have been nicknamed “The Fun Factory” at these conventions and I need someone to take over that name!!! Will it be you?