

**Community Crisis and Community Newspapers:
A Case Study of *The Licking Valley Courier****

Elizabeth K. Hansen^{**}

Eastern Kentucky University

Gary L. Hansen^{***}

University of Kentucky

*Paper presented at the Newspapers and Community-Building Symposium XVIII, co-sponsored by the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media at Kansas State University, the National Newspaper Association and the NNAF, North Charleston, South Carolina, U.S.A., October 5, 2012.

** Department of Communication, 317 Combs Bldg., Eastern Kentucky University, 521 Lancaster Ave., Richmond KY 40457-3102. Phone: 859-622-1871; E-mail: liz.hansen@eku.edu.

*** Department of Community and Leadership Development, 500 Garrigus Bldg., University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40546-0215. Phone: 859-257-7586; E-mail: ghansen@uky.edu.

Community Crisis and Community Newspapers: A Case Study of *The Licking Valley Courier**

“That little old paper IS West Liberty.”

– Charlie Conley, 69, lifelong resident of Morgan County, Kentucky

“Speaking of and for Morgan, the Bluegrass County of the Mountains”

– Front-page slogan appearing below *The Licking Valley Courier* nameplate

The Licking Valley Courier staff had wrapped up its work for the week on Friday afternoon, March 2, 2012, and left the newspaper’s office building located just off Main Street in West Liberty, population 3,345, the county seat of Morgan County¹, Kentucky. Earl W. Kinner, Jr., 73, the publisher and editor of the 101-year-old weekly, had gone to his home across the street from the newspaper his father purchased in 1944. His son, Gregory Kinner, the paper’s production manager, was at home next door. News Editor Miranda M. Cantrell, 28, was at her home five miles outside town.²

¹ While located in the town of West Liberty, Kentucky, *The Licking Valley Courier* serves all of Morgan County, which is small both geographically (383.73 square miles) and in population (13,923 in 2010).

² The experiences of Editor/Publisher Earl Kinner and News Editor/Reporter/Columnist Miranda Cantrell are described in this paper and both are quoted extensively. Unless otherwise noted, the source for each of these is a face-to-face joint interview the authors held with them on July 6, 2012 in the *Courier* office in West Liberty, Kentucky. Kinner grew up with *The Licking Valley Courier* from the age of six when his father bought the paper and the family moved to West Liberty. Kinner attended the University of Kentucky for three years where he worked with the campus newspaper in a role he describes as “basically a printer.” Cantrell began working at the *Courier* part-time while an undergraduate student at Morehead State University. She was employed full-time in 2006 after graduating with a degree in communications and sociology. Before the tornado, Cantrell was listed as a reporter/columnist although she functioned as the paper’s news editor. When the staff returned to town following the storm, her official title became news editor.

As the afternoon wore on, weather forecasters broadcast ominous warnings for large areas of Kentucky and surrounding states. Only two days before, a tornado had touched down in southern Morgan County, damaging three small communities.

Earl Kinner, whose wife had died in the summer of 2011, was tracking the storms. Just after 6 p.m. he heard the meteorologist say the most damaging tornadic activity in the United States that day was in the Morgan County area. Kinner headed for the basement door. Just as he reached it, an EF3 tornado demolished his house, trapping him in the rubble. His son's home next door was damaged beyond repair. The *Courier* building was destroyed along with most of downtown West Liberty.

The tornado left a 60-mile-long path of destruction in Kentucky. It swept through the heart of West Liberty, damaging or destroying the hospital, an elementary school, the 105-year-old Morgan County Court House, City Hall, the WPA-built building housing the Community Center, two 100-year-old churches, most of the downtown businesses and numerous homes. The twister also destroyed several outlying communities, killing six Morgan County residents.

In seconds, much of the *Courier's* community was gone.

After the storm passed, rescuers pulled Earl Kinner from the rubble of his home and one of them carried him to the damaged-but-still-standing City Hall a block away where a temporary shelter had been established. He was later moved to a shelter in Elliott County. His son and grandson "survived by inches" when the tornado hit their home, Kinner said. Cantrell's home was not in the path of the tornado and was undamaged.

The Kinnners' narrow escapes were similar to what happened to many West Liberty and Morgan County residents. Among them were Charlie and Martha Conley who took refuge in the basement of their West Liberty home with their son, his fiancée and her daughter, and their

grandson as the storm moved the house several feet off its foundation, tore away the basement stairs and ripped off the roof (Gardner 2012). After the storm passed, the Conleys and the others climbed out of the basement using a ladder their son had found. Their five-year-old grandson had been cut on the head by a falling cement block. Three of the four vehicles parked in the driveway of their home had been demolished. They tried to drive the fourth vehicle to the hospital to get help for their grandson. “We drove across yards and downed power lines, boards with nails. Three of the tires flattened,” Charlie Conley recalled. “We thought we could get to the hospital – we didn’t realize how bad the town was.” They turned back and then tried roads out of town but found them blocked by trees and downed power lines. Martha Conley said they eventually ended up at their son’s camper on the other side of the county that night because “there was no place else to go.” The next day, their daughter was able to reach them and take them to her home in Berea, Kentucky, 100 miles away.

Newspapers and Community

The tornado caused a crisis for the 4,000-circulation *Licking Valley Courier*, its staff and its community. Such a crisis brings the nature of often unspoken and taken-for-granted relationships to the surface and makes them visible. What we know about newspapers and their relationships with the communities they serve suggests this should be the case for the *Courier* and West Liberty. Sixty years ago Janowitz (1952) viewed newspapers as an institutional mechanism by which individuals are integrated into their residential community. A generation later, Stamm noted in *Newspaper Use and Community Ties: Towards a Dynamic Theory* (1985:11), “Few truisms are as firmly established in mass communications – communities are necessary to newspapers, and newspapers are necessary to communities.” In the present case,

both the newspaper itself and the community experienced a disaster and were in crisis mode and each may play a significant role in the other's recovery.

One of the most intriguing explanations of why local news and information matter comes from Freidland (2001) who developed a theory of the communicatively integrated community. According to Freidland, community is necessary for democracy to work but the overall opportunities for any given community are limited by its location in larger political and economic systems. However, the structure of communication in any community explains a great deal of the remaining variance in a community's capacity for democratic action and its capacity to respond to events. This means communication is the key to community resiliency in a time of crisis. Given the lack of alternative sources of local news in small communities like West Liberty, this suggests the newspaper plays a critical role in the community's ability to take action and, eventually, recover.

A recent "state-of-the-discipline" analysis by Underwood and Frey (2008) examines how community and its relationship to communication have been conceived in communication research. The authors note two communication perspectives on community, both of which highlight the significance of communication to community life. The transmission perspective views communication functioning as a tool to accomplish particular community goals. In contrast, the constitutive perspective focuses on both how communication creates, or is constitutive of, community and how it maintains community. Research by Heider, McCombs, and Poindexter (2005) on what the public expects from local news suggests the public itself recognizes the importance of local media for community life. Above all, the public wants a news medium that cares about the community, highlights interesting people and groups, understands the local community, and offers solutions to community problems. Some of these (i.e., caring

about the community and offering solutions to problems) may become particularly salient in the wake of a crisis. There also is evidence that local media provide residents more than information during the impact phase of disasters. They also provide emotional support and companionship (Perez-Lugo 2004).

While unacknowledged by many journalists in routine times, the above discussion suggests that the journalism practiced by local newspapers can be seen as community development, which is defined as the promotion of solidarity and agency (Bhattacharyya 2004). (Solidarity is the essential characteristic of community and the purpose of development is to produce agency.) Evidence that a crisis brings this role to the forefront comes from Usher's (2009) study of how journalists at the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* view the role of a post-Katrina newspaper. These journalists both saw their role as "objective" recorders of events complicated by their personal experience and saw the newspaper as an "advocate" for the city.

We now look at how *The Licking Valley Courier* responded, both immediately and longer-term, to the tornado and how members of the community, in turn, responded to the *Courier*.

After the Storm—The First Week

As the discussion above suggests, community newspapers often serve dual roles in their communities – objective source of news and community advocate. Never are those roles more apparent than in a crisis situation. And never is a community newspaper more a part of its community than when it, along with its community, experiences tragedy.

When the tornado struck West Liberty and the *Courier*, the staff's dual roles were apparent. For a few days, the staff was consumed with helping their neighbors and themselves. Earl Kinner was evacuated to a shelter in another county where he spent several days before he

was taken in by his son's in-laws. Cantrell volunteered at a shelter in a school near her home for three days. Although they, like their neighbors were in shock over what had happened, neither forgot their roles as community journalists. And although communication among staff members was difficult, they soon began working toward a common goal: informing their community and reassuring it that West Liberty would survive.

Cantrell said it took a few days to clear her head but as she saw people posting questions on Facebook and reporters from other papers kept calling her for information, she decided she needed to find a way to get information out to her community. Unable to contact Kinner for permission, four days after the storm Cantrell set up a Facebook page for the paper, which had never had an online presence. In her first post on March 6, she wrote this about the page:

I am setting this page up as a place to share information for tornado coverage when the newspaper returns. Please post any news, pictures or impressions you wish to share. This will help the LVC staff a LOT when we are operating again. Thanks!

She also posted this message on the page itself:

Please share any tornado-related news, pictures and impressions! This will help The Licking Valley Courier staff SO MUCH when we get our newspaper running again!

Thanks
Miranda M. Cantrell
Reporter/Columnist

Almost immediately, people began using the page to distribute news about disaster relief, funeral arrangements for storm victims, status of local businesses, video of the tornado, photographs, and requests for information about individuals and businesses. Cantrell also posted several pictures of the devastation in West Liberty as well as some messages of encouragement and hope. For example, she passed along a message of support for emergency service workers, but added a personal message:

How about we all give a big round of applause to all our friends at the fire department, police department, sheriff's department, state police, ambulance service and so many other emergency service agencies... These people have been working non-stop since Friday night and so many of them are my personal friends. We love you guys and hope you will be home with your families soon!

People also almost immediately began posting messages of support for the page itself:

Genius Miranda!! Good idea for this site! Almost as good as having our paper back....ALMOST!

I just wanted to say a huge THANK YOU for everything you are doing with sharing information. At times like this, one of the most important things is for people to have accurate information given. What you are doing is critical and vital to the recovery and rebuilding of Morgan County. Keep up the good work!

Following a public meeting at the high school the afternoon of March 7, which she covered,

Cantrell posted this bit of news on the Facebook page:

"From the ashes we will rise, because brighter days are ahead. West Liberty won't look the same... But it might look even better than before." - Judge Executive Tim Conley

She also told those who were reading the Facebook page they could expect a hard copy of the

Courier soon:

I won't be posting updates tonight or tomorrow because I will be writing a full recap of this afternoon's public meeting for the next print edition of the paper, and I will be going to Mt. Sterling with my co-worker to oversee the layout and printing of the paper. I encourage you to continue posting your own updates and to leave your personal thoughts about the disaster, as well as pictures. I thank you and I hope I have helped you get some of the information that you need. THE LVC WILL BE THERE TO COVER IT WHEN MORGAN COUNTY RISES AGAIN! ♥

On March 8, the paper's regular publication day, Cantrell posted her full story about the tornado that would appear in that day's print edition of *The Licking Valley Courier* and gave followers updates as the paper was produced:

We are at The Mt. Sterling Advocate waiting for the LVC to be printed!

Followed by:

THE LICKING VALLEY COURIER IS ROLLING OFF THE PRESSES AS WE SPEAK! WE DID IT!!! YES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Also on March 8, Cantrell posted something she had first expressed four days earlier on her personal Facebook page:

“A town is not its buildings - but the PEOPLE in it. Those buildings are gone, but the PEOPLE are still standing. WE are West Liberty. WE are Morgan County, and our home is still the greatest place in the world. When the smoke clears, we WILL rebuild our town. Today we are all friends and neighbors no matter where we may be scattered. Let's all stand strong to help others and get this county back in its feet. I LOVE MORGAN COUNTY AND I LOVE YOU ALL.” - LVC Reporter/Columnist Miranda M. Cantrell {3/4/12}

The March 8 paper was only one day late. On the morning of March 9, Cantrell posted a photo of herself and the newspaper advertising manager as the *Courier* rolled off the press in Mt. Sterling the day before. She wrote:

My co-worker Ricky Adkins and I with the special tornado edition of The Licking Valley Courier... It was one of the proudest moments of my life when I saw that press rolling our papers after our office was destroyed. This is newspaper is still a piece of our community that the storm couldn't take away from us, and I am so honored to be a part of it. Thank you all so much for your support. ♥

Although the *Courier* staff was able to salvage its circulation and business records from the ruins of its office, getting the paper to its 3,000 readers in the county after the storm was difficult. (Another 1,000 papers are mailed to out-of-county subscribers.) Recognizing distribution of the paper was going to be an issue with so many of the businesses that sold the paper destroyed and mail delivery disrupted, Cantrell posted:

Hey everybody, I don't know where the print edition of the LVC is being sold at this morning. But i am sure you could definitely find it at Cougar Corner or IGA. Subscriptions will be mailed out. Thank you so much all your support!

She also revealed she had not seen her boss since the tornado until after the paper was printed:

Mr. Kinner was just at my house... First time I have seen him in person since the storm. I can't begin to tell you what a good feeling it was to present him with this week's edition of The Licking Valley Courier. It was one of the proudest moments of my life. Here's

what he said to me:

"You've proven how good you are... Now you have to keep it up."

Looks like I'm gonna have to work harder to live up to such high expectations, but I'll do my best. :)

Cantrell may not have asked Kinner's permission to start the paper's Facebook page, but in an interview in July 2012 Kinner said he was "forever grateful" to her for doing it.

In the meantime, Earl Kinner was also working to get the *Courier* out. While still in a shelter, Kinner found pen and paper and began writing by hand a story about the tornado. Later he was taken in by relatives who lived 10 miles from town and had no cell service. But he was determined to get the paper out because "people rely on it."

Matt Hall, the publisher of the *Mt. Sterling Advocate* where the *Courier* and Kinner's other two papers, the *Wolfe County News* and the *Elliott County News*, are printed, came to Kinner's aid. He drove to the home where Kinner was staying and together they planned how to get the papers out. (Later he helped Kinner choose \$15,000 worth of equipment for the *Courier's* new office.) With no office in which to work, the staff worked from home or other locations and communicated through advertising manager Rick Adkins. Kinner later said in an interview, "With (Cantrell's) ingenuity and Ricky's ingenuity and my desire to survive," we got the paper out."

As Cantrell chronicled on the paper's Facebook page, the *Courier* was published the week following the tornado. While actually appearing a day late on March 9, 2012, the first issue of the *Courier* after the tornado carried the regularly scheduled publication date of March 8. Smaller than the previous issue's 16 pages, this eight-page edition featured Cantrell's front-page story about the disaster as well as multiple stories on the tornado reprinted from other newspapers in Lexington and Morehead whose help was acknowledged on the front page. As

Kinner said in a later interview, other newspapers were in a “better position” to provide coverage than the *Courier*. The March 8 issue also included information on where banks had relocated, what was operating at original locations, and contacts for applying for disaster funds. The paper also included a front-page photo of publisher Earl Kinner’s demolished home and told readers about the paper’s new Facebook page for obtaining and sharing information.

Community reaction to the appearance of the *Courier* was immediate, with the most notable example coming from Morgan County Judge-Executive Tim Conley who, during a news conference on March 9, held up a copy of the paper and cited it as “a sign of the town’s resilience.” In a similar vein, West Liberty’s Commercial Bank CEO Hank Allen was quoted (Brashear 2012) as saying, “It didn’t matter what was in it. It was still alive and still living and breathing, and it gave the community hope that we could recover.”

Other reactions were posted on Facebook and included the following:

Picked up my first copy of the LVC post tornado and was impressed that so much info got in with such a short time till press time and with the LVC building unable to house the paper and its employees at the time. With this kind of fortitude in this town we will recover in no time!

Read my first copy of the LVC post tornado. Hope Earl and Greg are well. Looking forward to some "normal" things in the paper, I can't believe I'm saying this but some pictures of huge turnips and deformed potatoes would be welcome right about now!!! Remember, as I've seen many times before ----"Speaking of and for Morgan County, the bluegrass county of the mountains" ! Go forward LVC!!!!!! God bless and here's hoping you find many many many simple and sweet stories of calm and everyday boring things, we all need some of that kind of thing right now....just some normal everyday happenings.

After the Storm—The Second Week and Beyond

Without an office in West Liberty, the *Courier* staff worked out of the Mt. Sterling *Advocate*’s office, about an hour’s drive from West Liberty, to produce the paper for approximately a month. Then they moved back to West Liberty into a temporary office, which

sits on the site where the *Courier's* office stood before the storm. Basically a double-wide trailer configured as office space; it was still in use in August of 2012. It sits on what remains of the concrete and tile floor of the destroyed building and includes production space for Kinner's three newspapers in one corner and a circulation area in the rear. Back issues of the paper published since the tornado are piled near the front door. Against a rear wall is a dresser, the only piece of furniture salvaged from Earl Kinner's home. The office is once again a place where community members drop in to share news, place an ad or buy a paper.

Recurring emphases/themes

A number of significant emphasis areas or themes have appeared in the *Courier* after the first post-tornado issue. First, the paper included stories and provided information about itself. For example, the March 15 issue noted how equipment problems were causing problems for the *Courier* and ran a front-page photo of the Morgan County Judge-Executive holding up the newspaper, as discussed above, as "a sign of the town's resilience." It also reprinted a Lexington *Herald-Leader* article "West Liberty Newspaper Rises from Rubble." Five weeks later (April 19) and in a lighter vein, a folksy "Publisher's Pen" column commented on how tornado newspaper debris was found miles away and returned to the paper. Another example comes from the April 12 issue of the paper in which the *Courier* announced its return to its previous location in downtown West Liberty and thanked the community for its help.

A second emphasis was obtaining assistance and recovery. For example, the March 29 issue included a story headlined "Historic Courthouse, WPA Building to be Preserved," the April 5 issue included stories on rebuilding the antique mall as an environmentally friendly "green" building and a Tennessee firm seeking to build homes, and the April 12 edition featured a front page story headlined "Zoning Commission to Plan the City's Reconstruction." In addition, the

April 19 edition included drawings depicting what Main Street reconstruction could look like and the May 3 issue included stories headlined “Football Field to Stay in Downtown West Liberty” and “Church to Rebuild but Famed Windows Can’t be Replaced.” A full-page story in the April 26 edition headlined “The Many Lives of a Small Town: A Brief History of Tornado-Struck West Liberty, KY” put community recovery in historical perspective. Written by Joe Nickell, the *Courier’s* historical writer whose column has provided historical sketches for more than 20 years, the article reviews the establishment of West Liberty, describes previous disasters (fires) and what they destroyed, and discusses what can be saved after the current disaster and why it is important to do so. The *Courier* also published information on deadlines for obtaining disaster assistance and weekly updates on the county’s long-term recovery team.

Finally, a third emphasis was the return to normalcy. For example, the March 29 edition of the *Courier* included a story on community events and activities that would be held as originally planned, and the regular community bulletin board and “community correspondent” reports returned. While not heralded as such, the return of 4-H and local sports stories in the April 5 issue and a story on attending prom in the April 26 edition also represented a return to normalcy. This theme continued well into the summer. Examples from the June 28 issue include a front-page story with the headline “Tradition to continue: July 4th celebration downtown as usual” and a sports story “65 days and counting until home opener at Herdman Field: Talented Cougar football team should provide therapy for rebuilding community.”

Morgan County Extension Agent Sarah Fannin (2012) believes the *Courier’s* mere presence “provides us with a sense of normalcy” and explains it by saying, “The newspaper is such a vital part of our town and county for old and young. Just like going to the Freezer Fresh

(also rebuilding) for a cherry Sprite and barbeque sandwich, you go get a newspaper after church on Wednesday night in Morgan County.”

Letters to the editor published after the tornado expressed both reader appreciation and support for both the newspaper and its staff. Examples from the March 29 issue include:

Dear Editor, Please renew my subscription. Can't wait to read more about tornado experiences such as written by Linda Oakley in the March 15 issue. Thanks, . . .

Earl, I was glad to hear you were not injured. I'm so very sorry about your home and business. My office next to Peyton's Pharmacy survived intact for the most part. If you're able to keep The Courier going, count me in with you. Have Miranda get with us when she can to let us know your plans. Keep the faith and stay strong. . . .

Dear Editor, It was simply wonderful to receive The Licking Valley Courier the first week after the tornado – Thank you! Sorry for your loss. . . .

Facebook

In the weeks following the tornado, the Facebook page continued to provide news about the recovery, links to other news media reporting on the community's recovery and, at times, breaking news, such as this post from Cantrell on March 12:

Hey everybody, I am sorry I haven't been able to post today, but I have been very busy... I DO have some GREAT NEWS THOUGH:

According to the Kentucky State Police there are NO additional tornado-related deaths in Morgan County besides what was listed in last week's paper (the Cecils, the Endicotts and Mr. Dulin). NO ONE died in West Liberty city limits! THANK GOD.

Cantrell also reported on what was happening with the newspaper itself. On March 15 she posted:

The Licking Valley Courier office has been razed. I drove by there this afternoon and ruins of the building were gone. Very sad, as I have worked out of that building for almost a decade... But it's like the old saying goes, "Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end." That is how we have to look at this devastation - not as an ending... But as a new beginning.

And on March 28:

The press is rolling the LVC at this moment. Three sections this week. We will be late getting back to West Liberty with it tonight.

Five months after the tornado, the *Courier's* Facebook page was still active. The “About” section of the page reads: “Covering the news of Morgan County and providing updates regarding tornado recovery and community events.” Posts in early August included notices about storm and flood warnings, information about the grand opening of the new fire station, teasers for the current issue of the *Courier* and questions and comments from members of the community. As of early August, 1,116 people had “liked” (are following) *The Licking Valley Courier* page. When interviewed, Cantrell acknowledged that, in addition to providing information, she uses Facebook to help people “stay positive,” which she admits is sometimes hard to do herself.

Lessons and Reflections from Editor/Publisher Earl Kinner

The March 2 tornado was not the first disaster Earl Kinner has faced as publisher and editor of the *Courier*. The *Courier's* building burned to the ground in 1985. At the time, the *Courier* was the last letterpress newspaper in Kentucky. Just as the *Mt. Sterling Advocate* helped the paper this time, *The Paintsville Herald*, then the *Courier's* printer, “took us in that time,” Kinner recalled. After the fire, Kinner built a 3,000-square-foot metal building to house the paper’s office, new offset production equipment and a job printing operation. The tornado destroyed that building.

When asked, Earl Kinner provided a few suggestions for other editors and publishers who may find themselves in situations similar to the one he has experienced. Most are not unique and apply equally to routine as well as crisis situations. They include:

- Have a good relationship with your printer.
- Don’t take sides.
- Get out a paper people want.

- Take care of your readers.
- Try to be fair.
- Like your community.

He also noted the *Courier* isn't likely to win a Pulitzer Prize and the "writing doesn't sparkle but it gives them (readers) community news."

As far as the future is concerned, Kinner believes the community will "make it" but worries that West Liberty, which had a compact downtown with old buildings and a main street people were proud of, will become like many other mountain towns strung out along highways with no central downtown. He thinks the paper can make it as well. He "hasn't laid anyone off" and notes that the "workers I've got I grew up with." (*Courier* Publishing employs seven people in West Liberty and two at the *Wolfe County News* in Campton.) Overall, newspaper circulation is about the same as before the tornado but counter sales are down since there are fewer places to sell the paper. Historically, most of the *Courier's* local advertisers have been small businesses and shops, some of which are now gone. The *Courier* also lost its job printing business, which had paid a salary. While it won't last indefinitely, there have been larger amounts of some types of advertising since the tornado with banks and other businesses announcing "we're back" and outside contractors offering their services. When it comes to the relationship between a community and its newspaper, Kinner says, "Any town with any spunk in it will have a pretty good newspaper."

Conclusion

As expected, the tornado, which physically devastated both West Liberty and *The Licking Valley Courier's* facilities, laid bare the integral ties between community and newspaper that are often less obvious during normal times. Interviewed four months after the tornado, *Courier* reporter Miranda Cantrell commented, "People didn't realize how much they liked us until they

thought they wouldn't have us." Charlie Conley, whose quote "That little old paper IS West Liberty" introduced this paper and whose March 2 experiences are recounted above, and his wife Martha continue to live with their daughter in Berea, Kentucky, a hundred miles from West Liberty, while their home is rebuilt (Gardner 2012). They read the *Courier* every week when it comes in their daughter's mail. Martha says she can't wait until Friday when the paper arrives and Charlie says reading the *Courier*, "Keeps me wanting to go home, I want to associate with the people there again. If it were not for the paper, I would not have a connection to the town and county." Such a response demonstrates the paper's creation of community solidarity. Combined with the fact the *Courier* was providing the information necessary for people to act (producing agency), this clearly illustrates why the type of journalism practiced by the *Courier* constitutes community development.

The experiences of the *Courier* staff in the aftermath of the tornado were in some ways similar to and in other ways different from those Usher (2009) identified among New Orleans *Times-Picayune* staff in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Like the *Times-Picayune* staff, the *Courier* staff saw the newspaper both as an "advocate" for the city as well as an "objective" recorder of events and they clearly did both. What is different from the *Times-Picayune* example is the fact that the *Courier's* "advocate" role wasn't hidden before the disaster. In many ways, the newspaper embraced it. Miranda Cantrell was quoted after the storm as saying Earl Kinner told her it's the *Courier's* responsibility to promote the community and the people in it and that's what they always tried to do (Brashear 2012). Whether intended or not, the *Courier's* slogan "Speaking *of and for* Morgan: The Bluegrass County of the Mountains" (emphasis added) seems to acknowledge the importance the newspaper places on both recording community events and advocating for the community.

The *Courier* provided information about itself and its staff after the tornado. It described, in both words and pictures, the devastation of the newspaper's facilities and Earl Kinner's home, the equipment and other problems the paper was encountering, and progress that was being made towards getting the paper out. The fact readers appreciated this isn't surprising considering the public wants, above all else, local media that function as "good neighbors" (Heider, McCombs, and Poindexter 2005). From all appearances, the *Courier* has been a "good neighbor" for a very long time. Just as people are concerned about good neighbors and want to know when they are having difficulty, readers who identify with and care about "their" newspaper will be interested in and want to know about the paper as well as its staff.

While the current case study has examined a single newspaper's response to a community crisis, it does suggest a number of things newspaper editors, publishers, and reporters may want to do to strengthen the relationship between their papers and their communities in routine as well as crisis situations. First, they can acknowledge the fact that doing good community journalism not only contributes to community development; it *is* community development. Second, they can acknowledge, if not embrace, the role of community advocate. As suggested above, this may require more personal involvement in the community and a different set of skills than those necessary for being a detached and objective recorder of events. Finally, they can be sure their newspaper is a "good neighbor," which means it will have to open itself up to the community, invest in it, and offer solutions to its problems. Many of these things do not receive recognition or win awards in the world of metropolitan journalism with its focus on "hard" news, investigative reporting, etc. While professional recognition and awards are nice, they aren't necessary for a community newspaper's functioning and survival. The good will and support of

community members and readers fostered by active community building are necessary, however, for a community newspaper to survive and thrive.

References

Bhattacharyya, J. (2004). Theorizing community development. *Journal of the Community Development Society*, 34, 5-34.

Brashear, I. (2012). Newspaper, radio station help rally tornado-ravaged town. Downloaded July 23, 2012 from the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues (<http://irjci.blogspot.com/p/rural-newspapers.html>).

Fannin, S. (2012). Personal e-mail, August 6.

Friedland, L. A. (2001). Communication, community, and democracy: Toward a theory of the communicatively integrated community. *Communication Research*, 28, 358-391.

Gardner, B. (2012). Personal e-mail providing transcript of discussion with parents Charlie and Martha Conley, August 3.

Heider, D., M. McCombs, & P. M. Poindexter. (2005). What the public wants from local news: Views on public and traditional journalism. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82, 952-967.

Janowitz, M. (1952). *The community press in an urban setting*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Perez-Lugo, M. (2004). Media uses in disaster situations: A new focus on the impact phase. *Sociological Inquiry*, 74, 210-225.

Stamm, K. R. (1985). *Newspaper use and community ties: Toward a dynamic theory*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

underwood, e. d. & L. R. Frey, L. R. (2008). Communication and community: Clarifying the connection across the communication community. In C. S. Beck (ed.), *Communication yearbook* (Vol. 31, pp. 370–418). New York, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Usher, N. (2009). Recovery from disaster: How journalists at the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* understand the role of a post-Katrina newspaper. *Journalism Practice*, 3, 216-232.