

A community loses its voice when it loses its newspaper

Another newspaper has been a casualty of a continuous trend in the publishing industry. The Ignace Driftwood, a weekly community paper in Ignace, Ont. has been operating since Christmas of 1978. They released their final regular edition on Oct. 31. This Christmas, they would have celebrated 40 years in the community. Dennis and Jackie Smyk were the publishers, editors, sales people and reporters for the paper. Shortly after the paper ended, it's owner Dennis Smyk passed away. He died on Tuesday, Nov. 6 at Dryden Regional Health Centre. Dennis said he faced cancer for a few years and has been extremely tired over the past couple of years, according to media reports. The Smyks were trying to sell the paper and even considered selling their home and business as a package. The township of Ignace lost a paper that reflects its citizens and a man dedicated to telling those stories. They released about 2,000 editions. The final editorial page of the Ignace Driftwood read 'I'm going to use my final editorial space to simply say, 'Thank You' to Jackie for being by my side for all these years for my family, life's ups and downs and for this newspaper.'

The death of that newspaper, let alone Dennis, who was referred to as Mr. Ignace, is a story that resonates with me deeply. After my tenure with the Melfort Journal, a weekly newspaper in North East Sask., I ventured on to work at the Moose Jaw Times-Herald, a daily newspaper in Moose Jaw, Sask, just an hour west of Regina. The Times-Herald began as a weekly in 1889 and converted into a daily in 1906. Over the course of the years, the paper had a multitude of owners. They were owned by Thompson Newspapers, Hollinger Inc., Can West, Transcontinental and Star News Publishing, an independent company, among other owners. My decision to move on from a weekly to a daily came over fears that the weekly paper I was at would shut down. It's the story that every reporter hears. Circulation is down and advertising revenue is declining. I figured a daily paper in a historic and large city wouldn't cease operations but I was wrong. The Times-Herald's impending end did not come as a surprise, however. Before I went there, rumors circulated within the community and even on social media that the paper would end. Despite this, I still decided to work hard day in and day out writing stories for the paper five days a week. I came in a time where turnover was high with reporters coming and leaving. I planned on making Moose Jaw my home for a while. I was part of a team that had a new managing editor, news editor, and another reporter working alongside a seasoned sports writer. We were all there for less than a year in those roles. Our editorial department have five reporters while our composition department had two graphic designers. All of us worked hard every single day to get the paper and the stories out on time, running around the city chasing stories the community needed to know while working at a 4 p.m. deadline. We were part of a team that was changing the face of the paper in the city. Residents and community leaders told us they liked our stories. We even created a new art section that was well received. We were on the cusp of truly something special, changing the perception of the paper, but unfortunately, our aspirations were cut short. We were given a month notice that the paper was closing. For those next four weeks we worked on releasing the best newspapers the city deserved, and created a special obituary paper that never made it online, only available exclusively in print. That final edition remains framed and hung on a wall in my house. Ironically, the weekly paper in Melfort, owned by Postmedia Network Inc., continued to publish their paper. The Journal however laid off all their employees in their pressroom, composition and bindery departments. They don't even have an office anymore, as the editor of that paper works from home. A community loses its voice when a newspaper closes down. You may have television broadcasts and hear snippets on the radio, but a newspaper gives you the opportunity to read all the details you otherwise wouldn't have read elsewhere. It holds those in power accountable to their actions while celebrating the achievements of residents in the city. Please support your community newspaper. It doesn't have to be this one.