

THE KANSAS PUBLISHER



OFFICIAL MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE KANSAS PRESS ASSOCIATION OCT. 21, 2015

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Check out the jobs that are available at Kansas newspapers.

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Doug Anstaett is tired of the lip service being given by elected officials to transparency.

KPA CALENDAR

OCT. 22

KPA staff members will be calling newspapers all day to complete a digital survey sanctioned by the Kansas Newspaper Foundation.

OCT. 23

CANCELED — Montgomery Family Symposium, University of Kansas.

NOV. 6

KPA district meeting, Topeka.

DEC. 15

National Bill of Rights Day.

APRIL 22-23, 2016

Kansas Press Association annual convention, Overland Park DoubleTree Hotel.

Brownback appeals order to disclose

Gov. Sam Brownback has appealed a Shawnee County District judge's order in September that denied Brownback's effort to block disclosure of information about applicants seeking appointment to expanded county commission seats in Saline County.

Shawnee County District Judge Rebecca W. Crotty had made the ruling a few weeks earlier.

The appeal also asks Crotty for "clarification" of her order, saying it was "unclear" whether the judge's memorandum decision and order is a "final determination of the parties' rights."

See **APPEAL** on Page 5

Hutch News also seeks records

A similar situation to the one in Salina has Hutchinson News executives seeking records as well.

Publisher John Montgomery said his newspaper is trying to get the list of candidates for a Reno County magistrate judge position that went to Cheryl Allen.

In a formal request by The News to obtain those under consideration for the bench, a spokesman from the governor's office denied the request, citing the same exceptions under the Kansas Open Records Act as the Salina case.



Emily Bradbury, director of member services for the Kansas Press Association, explains the various benefits

of KPA membership to participants in the Northwest District meeting Sept. 18 in Atwood.

Merriam announces retirement as hotline attorney

Mike Merriam, who has served as the Kansas Press Association's Legal Hotline attorney for more than three decades, announced his retirement this week due to ongoing health struggles.

Merriam was honored last November with the Above and Beyond Award from the Kansas Sunshine Coalition for Open Government, an organization that includes representatives of KPA,

the Kansas Association of Broadcasters, the Society of Professional Journalists, the League of Women Voters and media law advocates.

"Our association and its members owe a huge debt of gratitude to Mike for his loyal service as a media attorney and operator of the Legal Hotline," said Doug Anstaett, KPA executive director.



See **MERRIAM** on Page 7 **Mike Merriam**

Editors know good medicine, good information are critical

When Mercy Hospital announced in early September that it was ceasing its hospital and emergency department in Independence, it seemed like the collective soul of Independence, Kan., went into cardiac arrest.

And, there was no one in town with a crash cart ... or a prayer ... to attempt a rescue.

The plug has been pulled on a town's primary healthcare provider — a service that has been provided by the same religious charity since 1920.

That's the harsh reality confronting Independence, a town of 9,000 in Montgomery County.

Things aren't looking good in Independence. And the loss of a major entity, with 190 employees left with pink slips in hand, obviously is a gut punch.

However, if there is ever a need for a newspaper to explain the situation — perhaps demand a few answers, investigate the status of rural healthcare, and speak on behalf of a wounded town — it's now.

The Montgomery County Chronicle has spent countless column inches in the past six months devoted to the story of Mercy Hospital.

We reported on the efforts of the hospital's top brass to attempt a merger with a hospital in Coffeyville (those merger talks ultimately failed).

We spoke about Mercy's difficult decision to announce its closure in September.

We studied the issues that led to Mercy's decision to close, namely the changing population demographics, the failure to retain physicians in a rural market, and the policy decisions that are made (or aren't made) in Washington, D.C., and Topeka, Kan.

And, we have given ample coverage to other area medical providers as they try to make sense of the changing medical scene in southeast Kansas.

Not trying to toot my own horn, but I feel the residents of Independence and Montgomery County better understand

the current crisis affecting Independence simply because a local newspaper saw the situation as a major news story. It could not be ignored.

Nor could the Montgomery County Chronicle rely singularly on the few press releases from Mercy Hospital for answers.

Getting the information required old-fashioned, gum-shoe journalism: telephone calls and personal interviews with multiple area medical providers, a relationship with the Kansas Hospital Association (a fantastic information resource), and countless hours of reading previous news stories about the state of healthcare in rural America.

What has happened since September is that Independence has become a national poster child for a growing (and disturbing) trend: rural hospitals are on life support.

And, Mercy was among the first to issue a "Do Not Resuscitate" order.

The New York Times contributed greatly to the Mercy Hospital situation with a lengthy account in the Oct. 4 issue. Multiple stories in the political blogosphere have retold Mercy's situation, and reporters from

the Wichita Eagle, Topeka Capital-Journal and Kansas City Star have contributed greatly to the explanation of the local crisis, with heavy emphasis on the state of Kansas' refusal to expand Medicaid rolls (as part of the Affordable Care

Act funding mechanisms).

I believe this story is not over in Kansas.

The Kansas Hospital Association is already anticipating closures of other hospitals (large and small) in the coming year. And, every study under the universal medical sun has pointed to a sort of doomsday scenario as it pertains to rural health markets.

In Kansas, we have hospitals everywhere (Kansas ranks third in the nation in hospitals per capita). It's my hope that newspapers across the Sunflower State will brush up on their knowledge of rural health



Andy Taylor

What has happened since September is that Independence has become a national poster child for a growing (and disturbing) trend: rural hospitals are on life support.

See TAYLOR on Page 3

2015-16 KPA BOARD

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President

Iola Register

susanlynnks@yahoo.com

Sarah Kessinger

First Vice President

Marysville Advocate

skessinger@marysvilleonline.net

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Salina Journal

ofrandsen@salina.com

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Montgomery County Chronicle

chronicle@taylornews.org

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Northwest District Director

Lincoln Sentinel-Republican

johnbartz@gmail.com

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pcook@parsonssun.com

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mhoisington@gbtribune.com

Tim Kellenberger

Northeast District Director

Sabetha Herald

timmy@sabethaherald.com

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mcnews@mcnewsonline.com

Travis Mounts

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Times-Sentinel Newspapers

graphicdept@tsnews.com

Scott Stanford

Legislative Director

Lawrence Journal-World

sstanford@ljworld.com

Joey Young

Central District Director

The Clarion (Andale)

joey@kspublishingventures.com

Want to sell more ads? Try this proven technique

Michael was talking to me about one of his favorite sales techniques.

“Even though I’ve been selling ads for a lot of years,” he said, “there’s always something new to learn. A friend in the furniture industry shared a great idea on how to ask questions to get the right kind of information. I don’t know if this technique was developed specifically for the furniture business, but it works just as well in ad sales.”



John Foust

He explained that the technique involves asking a prospect to rate his or her experience with existing ads. Then it’s easy to shift the conversation to the benefits of advertising with his publishing company.

Step 1: “The first thing I do is determine where they are currently running ads,” Michael said. “If I already know, I just confirm it by asking, ‘I see you’ve been advertising with XYZ Media. Is that right?’ And if I’m not sure where they’re running, I ask, ‘Where are you currently advertising?’ In just a few seconds, they identify my primary competitors.”

Step 2: “The next step is to sincerely

compliment their current media choices. Find something positive to say, even if they are the weakest media outlets in the market. It’s foolish to be critical and put them in a position to defend their choice.

For example, I might say, ‘It’s easy to see why someone would pick that radio station. I know a few people who work there, and they are excited about their product.’”

Step 3: “This is where the magic starts,” Michael said. “I ask the prospect to rate the experience, by saying something like, ‘On a scale of one to 10 – with 10 being the best – how would you rate the job those ads are doing for you?’”

“People are generally willing to give their ads a rating. A 10-point scale seems to work better than a five-point scale, because there’s a wider range. Most people are reluctant to rate at the very top or bottom, so a rating of eight on a 10-point scale is more revealing than a rating of four on a five-point scale.”

Step 4: “Let’s say I talk to somebody who gives a rating of seven. Next I ask, ‘In your opinion, what would it take to

turn that seven into a 10?’ This question can produce a ton of good information. Sometimes they talk about their current marketing results and – most important – what they would like to accomplish in the

future. That opens a discussion about what I can do for them.”

Step 5: Then Michael works to manage expectations. “It’s unrealistic to expect a perfect 10,” he said. “After all, a lot depends on things in their businesses that are beyond my control – like parking and customer service. So I say, ‘I think we can

agree that perfection is rare. So let me ask if you would be happy if we change that seven to a nine?’”

See where Michael’s technique can lead. Looks like it’s worth a try.

John Foust has conducted training programs for thousands of newspaper advertising professionals. Many are using his training videos to save time and get quick results from in-house training. E-mail for information at jfoust@mindspring.com.

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Taylor

Continued from Page 2

facts and figures. Start digesting information. As unappealing as it might sound, you need to know the ins and outs of the Affordable Care Act, sometimes known as Obamacare.

Go to the Kansas Hospital Association’s website to seek any sort of data related to hospitals in the state. Talk to your hospital administrators to get a candidate perspective on the financial condition of your hometown hospital. Visit with your physicians to get their take on the situation. Discover how many people in your town are obtaining their health services in another county ... or another state. And, discuss the topic of local tax subsidies for hospital operations with your city and county leaders.

The more you jump into the rural health discussion, the better informed your readers will be whenever the budgetary axe has to fall on local healthcare.

I saw that axe fall hard and swift on

The more you jump in the rural health discussion, the better informed your readers will be whenever the budgetary axe has to fall on local healthcare.

a town that could never imagine a day without a local hospital. However, the realization has been met with a town that understands the challenges ahead — thanks to a newspaper that took the time to explain them.

There might not be a doctor in the house (in Independence), but there is, at least, a weekly newspaper that now knows the value of good medicine ... and good information.

Andy Taylor is the editor of the *Montgomery County Chronicle*. He currently serves as treasurer of the Kansas Press Association Board of Directors.

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Readers 'expect' us to fulfill our obligation

“So, you’re in the newspaper business more as a lifestyle decision, not to make your fortune,” the financial adviser said.

He didn’t mean it as a criticism, but it still hurt.

Truth is, the Iola Register’s heyday may be in the past.

Coupled with the challenges of the industry, southeast Kansas continues to lose population at a rate of about 9 percent every 10 years.

To help assuage my pain, he quickly pointed out newspapers are by no means unique in their battle to stand their ground in an ever-changing market. From hardware stores to electronics, medicine to law, those in generations-old businesses now feel as if they’re standing on quicksand.

“The pace of change is so fast, and

consolidation so pronounced in every field, that even if you discovered the next must-have device or service, you couldn’t bet it would be around in the next 15 years,” he said. “That’s the nature of business these days.”

To further massage my bruised ego, he threw me some soft questions.

“What do you like about your business?” “How is the Register regarded in the community?” “What would happen if you folded up shop?”

That last question really got me.

If the Register ceased publication I truly think a lot of residents would feel a vital public service had been withdrawn.

A newspaper isn’t like a restaurant or a dress shop, where when one shuts down another quickly replaces it.

The community can’t replace it with

a Facebook page. The idea of “citizen journalism” — the industry’s “answer” to widespread cutbacks — was short-lived. It takes real journalists to produce a high-quality product.

And publishers, of everyone, should demand nothing less.

A newspaper’s inherent responsibility is to educate and foster community. And our readers — even when they complain — expect us to fulfill this obligation.

So no, the Register isn’t raking in the bucks.

But I’d be hard-pressed to come up with a more important public service or rewarding career.

Susan Lynn is editor and publisher of the Iola Register and the 2015-16 president of the Kansas Press Association.



Susan Lynn

If the Register ceased publication I truly think a lot of residents would feel a vital public service had been withdrawn. A newspaper isn’t like a restaurant, or a dress shop ...

NAMES IN THE NEWS

Two Kansas Press Association staff members were recognized this past month for reaching their five-year anniversaries with the association.

Amy Blaufelder, staff accountant, and **Lori Jackson**, administrative assistant for advertising, began working at KPA in mid-2010.

“We’re proud of the great customer service and professionalism Amy and Lori have brought to our operation,” said Doug Anstaett, KPA executive director. “The feedback I get from members and clients about them is fantastic.”

The final of five district meetings of the **Kansas Press Association** will take place Nov. 5 at the KPA office in Topeka.

Previous meetings have been in Iola, Atwood, Garden City and Newton.

The meetings, from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., are an opportunity for **Emily Bradbury** to discuss the services KPA provides to its members and for **Doug Anstaett** to stress the importance of attending the 2016 Day at the Legislature next February.

In addition, KPA’s advertising director, **Amber Jackson**, discusses advertising sales opportunities through the Kansas Display Ad and Kansas Classified Ad networks and also provides basic sales training.

Grant Overstake is the new managing

editor of The Clarion in Andale.

Overstake previously served as editor of the Hillsboro Star-Journal and was a sports writer at the Miami Herald.

Cheryl Burns, La Crosse, has joined The Hays Daily News in advertising services and as a graphic designer. She is a graduate of Northwest Missouri State University and has two sons.

Virginia Madson, 97, has retired from The Horton Headlight after writing a personal column for more than two decades.

Madson, a 1940 graduate of the University of Kansas, penned “Sharing Through the Ages” for 23 years.

MiAi Parrish, president and publisher of The Kansas City Star since mid-2011, has left the newspaper to become president and publisher of The Arizona Republic, a Gannett publication where she worked in the newsroom from 1999 to 2001.

Kayleigh Lawson has been promoted to news editor of the Arkansas City Traveler.

Lawson, 29, is also the online editor and will continue to handle Traveler website and social media operations.

She started at the Traveler five years ago as a circulation clerk.

She is married to the former managing editor, Andrew Lawson, who is public information officer and special projects coordinator for the city of Arkansas City.

The **Kansas Attorney General’s Office** and the **Kansas Sunshine Coalition for Open Government** will offer free training on open records and open meetings laws Oct. 27 in Wichita.

Attorneys from Attorney General Derek Schmidt’s office will train residents on the state’s open government laws from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Wichita State University’s Marcus Welcome Center from 1 to 4 p.m. on Oct. 27.

The Gallery at Kansas Wesleyan University in Salina has hosted a photography exhibition of images by photojournalist **Tom Dorsey** of the Salina Journal.

“The Last Few Years: Found Images by Tom Dorsey for the Salina Journal” will run through Friday at the Gallery in Sams Hall of Fine Arts, 100 E. Claffin Ave., in Salina.

Dorsey has been a resident of Salina since 1962.

In 2010, he published a book of his photography titled “Stuff I’ve Shot: Sometimes I Get Lucky” and has earned awards from the Associated Press, Kansas Press Association, the National Press Photographers Association and Harris Enterprises.

Appeal

Continued from Page 1

The Salina Journal and The Associated Press filed the Kansas Open Records Act lawsuit seeking disclosure of information about applicants for vacancies on the Saline County Commission.

The litigation focused on whether KORA would force disclosure of all or part of the materials submitted by about 14 applicants to Brownback.

Besides the governor, Eileen Hawley, Brownback’s spokeswoman, and Kim Borchers, Brownback’s director of appointments, were defendants in the lawsuit.

The governor was responsible for appointing two members to the Saline County Commission after it was expanded by voters in a Nov. 4 election from three to five members.

In part, the lawsuit sought disclosure of all who sought the Saline County Commission vacancies.

The Salina Journal and the AP filed suit in January after the governor refused to reveal the identity of candidates seeking appointment to the two county commission posts.

The defendants had contended the requested records were exempt from the open records act and that Brownback wasn’t the custodian of the requested records.

On Sept. 18, Crotty said the requested county commission applications weren’t exempt under the open records law.

Huck Boyd Lecture set Nov. 5 at K-State

Rosalyn Durant, senior vice president, College Networks, Programming for ESPN, will be the speaker for the 16th annual Huck Boyd Lecture in Community Media at 9:30 a.m. Nov. 5 in the ballroom of the K-State Alumni Center. Her topic will be “Leadership lessons from an ESPN executive.” A panel discussion on social media will follow at 10:30 a.m.

The lecture and panel discussion are co-sponsored by the A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications at K-State and the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media.

SEPTEMBER KDAN, KCAN WINNERS

The following newspapers sold either direct placement, Kansas Display Ad Network, Kansas Classified Ad Network or out-of-state network ads in September.

Remember, if you sell a KDAN or KCAN, which run in almost 150 Kansas newspapers, you keep half the money. Sell one outside of Kansas (SDAN or SCAN) or do direct placement in other papers and keep half the commission allowed to KPA.

- KDAN — Gyp Hill Premiere, three ads, \$1,200 profit; Anderson County Review, five ads, \$4,125 profit; Derby Informer, one ad, \$170 profit; Iola Register and GateHouse Media, one ad each, \$400 profit; Hillsboro Free Press, one ad, \$400 profit; Scott County Record, one ad, \$340 profit.

- Out-of-state DAN — Anderson County Review, six ads for \$1,125 profit.

- KCAN — GateHouse Media, nine ads for \$1,350 profit; Anthony Republican, one ad for \$150 profit; Times-Sentinel, one ad for \$150 profit.

- Direct — Hays Daily News, five ads, \$717; Hillsboro Free Press, one ad, \$28.

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29 corporate tenants in the Bioscience & Technology Business Center at KU, including **Garmin** and **ADM**



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MARKETPLACE

NEWS

COPY EDITOR - The Topeka Capital Journal is seeking a copy editor. The right candidate will be a strong communicator and skilled wordsmith with an eye for cutting-edge design. Apply <http://tinyurl.com/morrisapp>. Questions call Kent at (785) 295-5655. (10-15)

REPORTER/PHOTOGRAPHER - A five-day-a-week newspaper is seeking an energetic reporter/photographer who can tell great stories and make local government meetings and issues interesting. PO Box 268, Newton, KS, 67114. (10-14)

REPORTER - The Wichita Business Journal is seeking a reporter who is able to marry strong traditional journalism skills with online and social media know-how. Whatever the platform, reporters in our shop produce content – original and curated – that is accompanied by perspective and context. Primary Responsibilities: Own the beat audience. Own the beat conversation. Build source network relentlessly. Contribute three to five online posts per day. Contribute 1 people and one enterprise story to the weekly print paper. Develop and curate a reporter page in the print paper each week, comprised of information, highlights and data gathered and reported on throughout the week. Meet or exceed goals relating to audience-engagement. Contact Editor Bill Roy at 316-266-6184 or broy@bizjournals.com. (10-5)

STAFF WRITER/EDITOR — Do you have a passion for writing? The Independence Daily Reporter, a growing 134 year old institution, is looking for a motivated, self-driven Staff Writer/Editor to join our team. You must have your own transportation and a flexible schedule. Requirements include: A firm grasp of English and writing, open to learning newspaper format and able to keep up in a fast paced environment that changes daily. Please send a resume and sample of your work to josh.umholtz@indydailyreporter.com (9-29)

MANAGING EDITOR — A small three day a week publication in North Central Kansas is seeking a managing editor. This person will be in charge of a staff of three. Responsibilities will be to plan news coverage and photos, design and layout pages, deal with the public and keep track of ads. Journalism degree preferred, but someone with experience will be considered. We will train the right candidate. Apply by contacting Brad Lowell, jbrad@nckn.com, Box 309, Concordia, KS or call

785-243-2424. (9-22)
REPORTER/PAGE DESIGNER — The Arkansas City Traveler seeks help in the newsroom with reporting and designing pages. Duties include newsroom coverage and writing, for both print and Web; some page design; and occasional photography. Candidates should have basic computer, writing and interpersonal communication skills. We seek people who are motivated and organized, show initiative, and have a good attitude. Familiarity with Adobe InDesign and Photoshop software would be a plus, but is not a requirement. We will train the right candidate. To apply, email daseaton@arkcity.net or call (620) 442-4200 ext. 122. Drop off a resume at the Traveler office, or mail one to The Arkansas City Traveler, 200 E. Fifth Ave., Arkansas City, KS 67005. (7-22)

DIGITAL JOURNALIST — The Wichita Business Journal is looking for a digital journalist who is passionate about growing audience using compelling content, strategic social media techniques and analytics at an award-winning operation that is part of a great company. Our digital editor is in charge of all the WBJ's digital efforts, from posting blogs to engaging with readers using social media and creating strategies for delivering content. Interested? Check out more information here: <http://acbj.com/careers/detail/acbj.1611> (7-13)

FREELANCER — Journalist/writer with experience in breaking/hard news, features and news narrative looking for freelance work. Journalism degree plus 20 years experience. Reply to JMcdaniel19714@gmail.com. (5/20)

MANAGING EDITOR for small daily on High Plains, on I-70. Are you ready to step up? This person will lead a full-time staff of three, plus part-timers, plan and track news coverage, coordinate photo and stories, design and lay out pages, cover some meetings and write some stories, deal with public and online/Facebook pages, generally run the newsroom. Journalism degree preferred, at least two years' newspaper experience. This is a good paper, hoping to get better. Apply to Sharon Friedlander, publisher, sfriedlander@nwkansas.com, and Steve Haynes steve.haynes@nwkansas.com. Colby Free Press/Nor'West Newspapers, Colby, Kan. (785) 462-3963. EOE m/f/h/v (4-30)
REPORTER/NEWS EDITOR for award-winning weekly on High Plains. Are you up to the challenge of continuing a strong tradition? Can you do it all? Do you want

to learn the news business? This person will plan news coverage, coordinate the work of part-time staff, cover stories and features, take photos, design and lay out pages, post to web pages and Facebook. Journalism degree or some newspaper experience preferred. Will consider two years-plus experience. Pay commensurate with ability and experience. Competitive pay, benefits, location in Northwest Kansas. Apply to steve.haynes@nwkansas.com and dpaxton@nwkansas.com. The Norton Telegram/Nor'West Newspapers, Oberlin, Kan. (785) 475-2206. EOE m/f/h/v (4-30)

MANAGING EDITOR — The Pittsburg Morning Sun is looking for an editor. We're looking for a hands-on managing editor who can lead by example and motivate a strong news team. Please send a cover letter, resume: mguthrie@gatehousemedia.com.

ENTERPRISING community journalist needed at award-winning weeklies near resort lakes. Great place to start. Fully paid benefits. Details at <http://marionrecord.com/job/>

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ADVERTISING SALES – Accepting resumes for a self-motivated, goal driven individual to join an award winning sales team. Must have excellent written and oral communication skills. Established client base with the opportunity to develop new clients for both print and on-line business will be provided. Competitive pay and generous benefit package. Current driver's license and reliable car required. Send resume and cover letter to Mary Karst at maryk_ads@dailynews.net or mail to The Hays Daily News, P.O. Box 857, Hays, KS 67601.

DIGITAL MEDIA

Tired of not being able to update your website? Do you hate the design, but have no one on staff who can alter it? Have your eyes widened in shock when hearing what a new website might cost? Relax ... The Hays Daily News' Pixel Power Haus is your solution. Call Patrick Lowry at (785) 628-1081 to hear how we can help. Designed by a newspaper, for newspapers.

PRESSROOM

PRESS OPERATOR — The Junction City Daily Union has an opening for a qualified web offset operator for our six-unit Goss Community press. We are a five-day-a-week morning newspaper with several outside



Mike Merriam is shown presenting a session on legal issues at a past meeting of the Kansas Press Association. He announced his retirement this week due to ongoing health struggles.

Merriam

Continued from Page 1

“His professional expertise, coupled with his dry sense of humor, will be missed in our organization and throughout the Kansas media landscape.”

Merriam received his law degree from Washburn University in 1976 after earning a bachelor’s degree from the University of Kansas.

He devoted his legal practice almost entirely to press and First Amendment representation for more than three decades, representing many newspapers, communications companies, broadcasters, media insurance companies and wire services.

He proposed and formed the Kansas Bar Association’s Media Bar Committee in 1988 and teamed up with KU law professor and colleague Mike Kautsch for years presenting the “Mike and Mike Show” on open government issues.

For well over three decades, he has provided invaluable service as the Legal Hotline attorney for KPA, KAB and the Sunshine Coalition.

“When I was an editor and publisher, one thing I really appreciated about Mike was his belief in what we journalists were trying to accomplish,” Anstaett said. “He encouraged us to be unafraid of taking risks in going to press with information the public needed to know.”

Merriam had this to say about his retirement: “Personally, I tell you that the most prestigious clients of my career, the ones that have filled me with pride and accomplishment, have been the Kansas Press Association, the Kansas Association of Broadcasters, the Topeka Capital-Journal, and WIBW. I miss them terribly already.”

For the time being, legal questions should be directed to Anstaett or Emily Bradbury, director of member services for KPA toll-free at (855) 572-1863.

KPA and KAB will be working together to identify Merriam’s successor.

MARKETPLACE/CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

printing jobs. Good mechanical skills, valid driver’s license, along with a good work ethic needed to join our team. We offer a benefits package that includes BC/BS health insurance, 401k and more. Submit your resume with references or request an application by contacting production.mgr@thedailyunion.net

PART-TIME PRESS OPERATOR — The Great Bend Tribune is seeking a part-time press operator to join our printing team. The ideal candidate will have previous web press experience, including print of process color

and press make-ready. Good work ethics along with mechanical skills and ability to react quickly to print related problems. We are willing to train the right person. Job requirements include: • Current valid driver’s license with clean driving record, ability to pass a written fork lift test and train on lift; • Color vision and depth perception; • Ability to lift a minimum of 75 pounds; • Ability to read and comprehend written and/or oral English instruction along with ability to communicate effectively with team members. To submit a

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KPA OFFICE STAFF

Doug Anstaett

Executive Director
danstaett@kspress.com
(785) 249-1108

Amy Blaufelder

Accountant
ablaufelder@kspress.com

Emily Bradbury

Member Services Director
ebradbury@kspress.com

Richard Gannon

Governmental Affairs Director
rgannon@kspress.com

Amber Jackson

Advertising Director
ajackson@kspress.com

Lori Jackson

Administrative Assistant/Advertising
ljackson@kspress.com

KPA CONSULTANTS

Tom Eblen

News Consultant
teblen@sunflower.com

Mike Kautsch

Media Law, KU School of Law
mkautsch@ku.edu

Position Open

Media Law, Legal Hotline
Call Doug Anstaett or Emily Bradbury at (855) 572-1863

Nick Schwien

Technology Hotline
(785) 650-8372
nschwien@dailynews.net

FRIENDS OF KPA

Ron Keefover

Retired, Kansas Court System
President
Kansas Sunshine Coalition
for Open Government
ronkeefover@gmail.com
(for questions on cameras in the courtroom and other issues involving the court system in Kansas)

Positions are elected; secrecy is unconscionable

The word “transparency” has become such a staple in the talking points of politicians and would-be elected officials that you would think information gathering would be a breeze for journalists.

Not so much.

While it’s easy to say you’re for something — like open government — what happens when the rubber meets the road?

Today’s front page story on The Salina Journal’s victory in the courtroom is a case in point.

Despite winning the court battle against Gov. Sam Brownback, the Journal still waits more than a month later for the records it has sought for almost a year about the list of candidates the governor considered while appointing two new members to the Saline County Commission.

The Kansas Open Records Act exceptions cited by the governor and his staff members have been found to be without merit by Shawnee County District Judge Rebecca Crotty.

The judge agrees with the Journal’s argument that the public has a right to know who applied for the two seats.

These, after all, are elected positions.

Usually, people interested in being a county commissioner have to file for office, run some kind of campaign and tell the voters why they should be the ones elected to office.

Under state statute, after Saline County voters changed their commission from a three-member to five-member board, Brownback had the job of filling the vacancies.

For the governor to argue these “candidates” had to be shielded from the public because revealing their names might invade their privacy is a vacuous argument.

His argument, that letting the cat out of the bag about who he considered would discourage citizens from stepping forward, is an insult to the intelligence of most Kansans.

Elections are conducted in the sunshine for a number of reasons, the least of which is because that is our system — and it has worked for more than 150 years.

Despite the fact that fewer of us are voting each year, those of us who do vote still cherish this fundamental right.

To allow those who want to be appointed to a vacancy to remain anonymous is antithetical to our way of government.

We have a similar situation brewing in

Hutchinson, where the governor has so far refused to release the names of those who applied for a Reno County magistrate judge’s position that opened before the sitting judge’s term had expired.

The person he chose might very well be the most qualified candidate who applied for the position, but who can be sure? The list of her competitors is being kept secret.

For our system of government to work, we need to know these things.

For a governor to cite flimsy reasons for withholding the names is the opposite of transparency; it is secrecy.

Enough goes on in government that we don’t know about. We don’t need candidates taking office who have not been fully vetted and able to be compared to their competitors.

Judge Crotty has said there is no reason

to keep these names secret.

Is there some good reason that the governor has appealed her ruling — other than to continue the stonewalling and secrecy?

Doug Anstaett is executive director of the Kansas Press Association.



Doug Anstaett

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resume with references or request an application contact jaudus@gbtribune.com.

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THIS MONTH’S QUESTION

Q. A person questioned our decision to require a “Paid for by” disclaimer on an ad seeking the approval or defeat of a local bond issue. They said they could find nothing in the law requiring a disclaimer. Who is right?

A. You are. In KSA 25-2407, issues such as bond elections and other special questions submitted to voters are included in the requirements for disclaimers. A previous statute only addressed candidates for office, but this one directly addresses the “issues” question as well. It is on the KPA website at www.kspress.com under Member Services in the Media Law Library. Click on Rules on Political Advertising.