Viers, Adobe InDesign Session

The 2017 edition of the APA’s annual SuperConvention set for July 5-8 at the DoubleTree Hotel in downtown Little Rock started to take shape Friday when the convention planning committee met at the convention site.

The convention will have a patriotic theme. As always a lot of attention was paid to creating convention programming that is useful and relevant to APA members attending and it appears the committee took a huge step in that direction in the two-hour planning session.

Convention Chairman Byron Tate appointed Jay Edwards to chair the annual golf outing, a fund-raiser for the Arkansas Newspaper Foundation. Jay is to research possible venues for the event. Be watching for more details.

The golf outing officially kicks off the convention, and is followed immediately Wednesday evening with the traditional “early bird” party. The initial plan was to have that gathering at the Clinton Presidential Center, but those plans are not yet confirmed.

Among the speakers at the convention will be Ed Henninger on “25 Things Every Publisher Should Know,” and Russell Viers for a pair of sessions on timely trends and topics in the industry.

The keynote speaker for the convention will be announced very soon and will certainly be appropriate for advancing the patriotic them of the gathering. Be watching for more details on that.

The SuperConvention will end with the editorial awards luncheon Saturday, July 8.

Others attending the planning session Friday were Kelly Freudensprung of Benton, Melinda Faubel of AT&T Arkansas, and Leslie Taylor of UAMS.

Nominating Committee Seeks Candidates for Board Vacancies

The APA nominating committee will meet in March to select three nominees to fill vacancies that have either occurred or will occur in the near future.

Those interested in being considered for a position on the APA board should contact either nominating committee chairman, Rusty Fraser, at rusty@stonecountyleader.com, or Tom Larimer, APA executive director at tom@arkansaspress.org.

One of the nominees will fill the seat of Rusty Fraser who will be leaving the board at the conclusion of his year as immediate past president. The other two vacancies were created by the resignations from the board by David Mosesso and Shane Allen.

There are 11 board seats that are divided between daily and non-daily newspapers. The board is a policy-making board that meets three or four times per years two in two-day retreats held in the spring and fall at various locations around the state.

The other present board members include Nat Lea, president; Byron Tate, vice president; Tom White, second vice president; Jay Edwards, John Bland, Rusty Turner, Ellen Kreth, Sue Silliman and Clark Smith.

VIERS WORKSHOP AT APA – Russell Viers, left, makes a point with his smart phone during a daylong workshop held last Thursday at the APA building in Little Rock. Over 30 attended the fast-paced session on using InDesign for newspaper and other print production, and for handling and storage of photographs. If you missed this workshop you’ll get another chance this summer when Viers returns to the APA SuperConvention Friday, July 7, at the DoubleTree Hotel in Little Rock.

Convention planners lay groundwork for 2017 gathering

The APA nominating committee will meet in March to select three nominees to fill vacancies that have either occurred or will occur in the near future.

Those interested in being considered for a position on the APA board should contact either nominating committee chairman, Rusty Fraser, at rusty@stonecountyleader.com, or Tom Larimer, APA executive director at tom@arkansaspress.org.

One of the nominees will fill the seat of Rusty Fraser who will be leaving the board at the conclusion of his year as immediate past president. The other two vacancies were created by the resignations from the board by David Mosesso and Shane Allen.

There are 11 board seats that are divided between daily and non-daily newspapers. The board is a policy-making board that meets three or four times per years two in two-day retreats held in the spring and fall at various locations around the state.

The other present board members include Nat Lea, president; Byron Tate, vice president; Tom White, second vice president; Jay Edwards, John Bland, Rusty Turner, Ellen Kreth, Sue Silliman and Clark Smith.
It didn’t take long for someone in the Arkansas legislature to introduce yet another bill seeking to remove public notices from Arkansas newspapers and allow them to be “published” on a government web site.

This time it is Sen. Bart Hester who is the lead sponsor of Senate Bill 114, another in a line of bills in recent legislative gatherings that attempt to move the public’s business to a government-controlled and administered web site where it will, you know, be safe.

We deal with this sort of proposition during every legislative session and we make the case for why doing this is a really bad idea. Inevitably the case for the proposition is based in economics and saving the government from having to pay for publishing public notices in newspapers. They make out as if newspapers are getting rich from publishing these government notices.

Of course we all know that’s far from the truth. In most instances among the APA membership, government public notice revenue is a very small percentage of overall revenue. But to hear proponents of such measures talk you would think we’re all getting fat and happy from publishing public notices at government expense.

My first thought when I see such proposed legislation is, “what are they trying to hide.” SB 114 specifically targets delinquent taxes on “mineral interests.” If you are a property owner and you own the mineral rights on your property, there’s a tax to be paid to maintain that right of ownership. It’s a very small tax, but failing to pay it can result in the loss of your mineral rights.

How could you lose something that you own? Because someone else can buy them out from under you for a pitance. Publishing the list of delinquent taxes in the newspaper makes it very easy for a property owner who may not even be aware they were supposed to pay such a tax to see that they owe it and get down to the courthouse and pay it. If they don’t see it in the newspaper, you can bet their friends and neighbors will and will let the property owner know about it.

But who’s going to see it on a government web site? You could ask those folks up in Newton County about that. An application for a massive hog farm operation in the watershed that feeds the Buffalo National River was “published” on a government web site, and not surprisingly nobody concerned about the future well being of the Buffalo River had any clue what was about to happen.

Do you think if that application had been published in the local newspaper anyone would have seen it? Of course they would have, and in time to actually have done something about it before it became a done deal. This example alone should be sufficient to convince anyone that moving public notices out of newspapers and onto a government web site is a really bad idea.

So one might ask what is the real motivation for wanting to move this particular delinquent tax list to a government web site? Who stands to benefit most? These are the relevant questions that need to be asked, and that will be asked as this proposed bill makes its way through the legislature.

In the meantime, it is imperative that you be contacting your legislators, representatives and senators, to let them know that anything that moves public notices out of newspapers only to hide them on a government web site is bad business. It is imperative because this is just one of many bills to take such action that will likely be forthcoming.

If we don’t say anything, if we don’t make the case for public notices in newspapers, if we leave the legislature to their own devices, we cannot expect a good outcome.

Almost every one of the bills filed to take public notices out of newspapers make allowance for putting the notices on a government web site. Proponents make it sound like this is something free, and that government required to “publish” public notices can save the expense of paying a newspaper to publish it.

That, of course, is nonsense. Somebody has to post these things online and it’s not likely that someone with the expertise to do it is going to do it for nothing. Then there’s equipment to be purchased, web sites to be administered and secured against hackers. That’s not free.

So if someone tells you they’re for moving public notices out of newspapers to save the expense, you might suggest to them that it would not. You might also add that at a time when the public seems intent on shrinking government and reducing government intrusion into our daily lives, that this is actually growing government and for no good reason.

And then there is this: public notices published in Arkansas newspapers are already online and at absolutely no cost to government at any level.

The vast majority of newspapers in Arkansas upload the public notices from their newspapers to an aggregated web site operated by the Arkansas Press Association. It is searchable and it is secure, or as secure as a web site can be made these days.

Go to www.publicnoticeads.com/AR and take a look. If you can’t find your newspaper’s public notices there, it could be that someone is forgetting to upload them. Please check on this and make sure someone is designated to do it. If you need assistance doing the upload, contact the APA office and we’ll get you going.

We use this web site as part of our argument against moving public notices out of newspapers and onto a government web site. If the desired goal is to get public notices online, then that goal has already been achieved, and again at no cost to the government at any level.

You could also help by publishing the web address above to make the public aware that this is a resource available to them for no cost. When it comes to public notices, Arkansas newspapers have you covered.

Have a great week!

Tom
— 30 —

James Austin Johnson

James Austin “JJ” Johnson, 69, who formerly worked for the Ashley News Observer in Crosssett and the Chicot County Spectator in Lake Village, died Dec. 11.

He was an avid photographer and motorcyclist.

He earned a bachelor’s degree from Carson-Newman University in Jefferson City, Tenn. and worked at The Franklin County Citizen and several other newspapers in Georgia before moving to Crosssett to accept a position at the News Observer. He had retired from the Spectator for health reasons back in 2004.

— 30 —

Phyllis Stokes

Phyllis Marie Walker Stokes, 58, of Pine Bluff, a former part-time writer for the Pine Bluff Commercial, died December 6. She worked on special projects for the Commercial and for SEA Life magazine.

She was born January 29, 1958 in Pine Bluff and spent much of her life working in various ministries when she wasn’t writing or working at a newspaper.

‘Last minute’ arrives For APA Advertising Contest entries

The long-awaited last minute for getting entries into the APA’s annual Better Newspaper Advertising Contest has arrived. The deadline for entries is Jan. 31.

Members of the Oklahoma Press Association will judge the entries this year. Entries are submitted and judged electronically.

There’s a lot more information on the contest and how to enter at http://www.newspapercontest.com/Contests/ArkansasPressAssociation.aspx.

Legislature Considering Bills Affecting FOIA, Public Notices

Among the bills being considered early in the general session of the Arkansas legislature are bills to amend the state’s Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and at least one to remove a public notice from newspapers and allow it to be “published” on a web site.

APA members have been asked to make contact with their legislators presently considering such legislation. When you are asked to make contact with your legislator please make it a priority. This goes a long way in helping the APA lobbying team to prevent laws being passed that would detrimentally impact the newspapers of Arkansas.

Some of those bills presently being considered but certainly not all affecting the newspapers of Arkansas include:

• Senate Bill 114 by Sen. Bart Hester, which would remove the requirement for publishing notice of delinquent taxes on mineral interests and allow them to be “published” on a web site.

• Senate Bill 12 by Sen. Gary Stubblefield, which would create a FOIA exemption for school security plans and records, removing them from public review.

• House Bill 1248 by Rep. Jeff Williams, which would create a FOIA exemption for police dash cameras and body-worn cameras, removing these from public view.

The APA lobbying team is working to defeat these bills and you can be of great assistance. When you are asked to contact your legislature, please assign it a top priority. You won’t be asked unless it is extremely important that you take this action.

It’s also important that you report any feedback you get from these contacts to Tom Larimer, APA executive director.

“We have an excellent lobby team,” Larimer says. “But when legislators hear from their editor or publisher back home regarding a piece of legislation they’re proposing it makes all the difference.”

Judges! We need judges

The Arkansas Press Association (APA) is still short on the number of judges needed to judge the Oklahoma Press Association (OPA) contests, including ads, news and photography.

The judging could not get much easier. The entries are mailed by OPA directly to judges who have three weeks to get them judged and returned.

We originally needed 45 judges but we are still well short of that number. Please consider signing up to judge by contacting APA contest administrator Terri Cobb at terri@arkansaspress.org or call the APA office at 501-374-1500.

For those registering we will need your name, title, email and phone, plus the shipping address for the entries. Also needed will be the frequency and circulation of your newspapers and the types of categories you’d like to judge.

Members of the Oklahoma Press Association will be judging the APA contests this year in exchange of our judging of theirs. Please consider volunteering your time to help judge the OPA contest. The more judges we have the easier it is on everyone.
Guest Editorial:

Bill Would Block Access to Information

(EDITOR’S NOTE: This editorial was originally published in December in The Jonesboro Sun.)

We cringe before every legislative session begins because we know a handful of legislators will propose new laws exempting access to public information. Such will be the case in January when lawmakers convene for the 91st General Assembly.

Sen. Gary Stubblefield, R-Branch, filed Senate Bill 12 that, if passed, would exempt public schools — ranging from prekindergarten to state funded universities — from releasing emergency and security records under the state’s Freedom of Information Act.

Arkansas once had one of the nation’s strongest public records laws, but that’s changing with each legislative session, and it’s affecting your right to know.

Stubblefield’s bill seems reasonable on the surface.

It would exempt “records or other information that upon disclosure could reasonably be expected to be detrimental to the public safety, including without limitation records or other information concerning emergency or security plans, school safety plans, procedures, risk assessments, studies, measures, or systems.”

Seems reasonable, right? Who’d want just any Tom, Dick or Harry to gain access to a school’s emergency plan or risk assessments?

But the bill goes further.

It would also exempt “records or other information relating to the number of licensed security officers, school resource officers, or other security personnel, as well as any personal information about those individuals; and any other records or other information relating to or having an impact upon the security or safety of persons, structures, facilities, or other infrastructure of a public school district or public school.”

Arkansas State University officials support the legislation, spokesman Jeff Hankins told Sun reporter Sarah Morris.

Hankins called it “responsible safety legislation” for universities and stressed the importance of keeping sensitive information out of the wrong hands.

On the surface, we agree with Hankins that information regarding security plans and measures that could jeopardize public safety should be handled cautiously and with great care.

However, Stubblefield’s bill would essentially allow A-State and other universities to operate top secret police forces.

Want to know how many officers patrol the public university you’re considering paying top dollar for your son or daughter to attend? Under Stubblefield’s bill, you can forget about that.

Want to know who those officers are? Stubblefield’s bill suggests you can forget about that, too.

You heard an officer got fired at the university and want to find out why? Under Stubblefield’s bill, you can forget about that as well, because acknowledging the department isn’t at full force could create a security threat to the university and jeopardize campus safety.

Want to know if school resource officers are at the school you’re considering sending your child to? Forget about it, Stubblefield says.

The hypothetical could go on and on, but the public can rest uneasily knowing public officials would cite a disclosure exemption for any record they believe they could get away with. It’s a challenge we regularly face, and costly lawsuits that waste private and public funds are the only way to challenge a public official’s abusive manipulation of public records laws.

John E. Tull III, an attorney who is a staunch defender of the state Freedom of Information Act and an asset to anyone who believes government should be transparent and accountable, said past instances suggest Stubblefield’s proposed law could be abused.

“While I would hope and expect that such discretion would be used judiciously, my experience is that at times such discretion may be abused,” Tull recently told The Sun.

While Stubblefield’s intentions may be in the right place, his legislation is overreaching, and the potential for abuse is great.

We’re living in a time where government agencies and officials need more accountability and transparency, not secrecy.

Let your legislators know you do not support Senate Bill 12 or any legislation that would deny reasonable access to information.