

Opinion: Will a free press survive?

By Kathryn Reed

Does news matter? *Yes.*

Do the media matter? *Depends who you ask.*

Does where you get your news from matter? *Depends who you ask.*

Do people still care about unbiased news? *Not as much as they once did.*

Today is World Press Freedom Day. The UN General Assembly designated May 3 as such in 1993. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right as stated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

In the United States we have had such freedoms since 1787 when the Constitution was signed. The First Amendment says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

Not a week goes by that someone tells me I should take down the comments section on *Lake Tahoe News*. It’s because they don’t like the tone of the comments, they don’t like the

meanness, they disagree with what is being said, and they don't like the anonymity.

Too bad, they are staying.

I agree, though, the anger, the meanness, the name-calling, the childish behavior – it's all horrible.

But I tell people a few things. First, stop reading the comments if they are so offended by them. Second, there is no way to know someone is really Jane Doe. People contend Facebook is a way of getting people to use their real name, but people use fake names there, too. And using a third party like FB is a bad way of doing business. Third, my guess is 98 percent of the people believe what they are writing, while the other 2 percent just want to stir the pot. Read the message and not the tone. I believe people are angry, they are disgruntled and they want to be heard. Maybe we should be exploring why there is such venom out there instead of trying to quash it. Real name or not, this is still their belief. Fourth, some people because of their job need to use a different name.

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I think some people in the Lake Tahoe Basin are afraid of the truth. They don't want it in a news story, an opinion piece or a comment. Most of all, they don't want it in black and white for the entire world to see. (*LTN* is read in more than 100 countries, and more than 3,000 cities.)

Lake Tahoe News is here to publish the truth. We don't believe there is good or bad news, positive or

2013 in figures

- 71 journalists killed
- 826 journalists arrested
- 2,160 journalists threatened or physically attacked
- 87 journalists kidnapped
- 77 journalists who fled their country
- 6 media assistants killed
- 39 netizens and citizen-journalists

negative news – there is just news.

News is like people. It comes in different shapes, sizes, colors, warts and all. It can be elegant, ugly, hard to look at and pleasing. It can be fun, entertaining, enlightening and educational. It can be mundane and boring. It can change your life – just like people can.

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People have more choices of where they get their news today. They can get it from nearly every spectrum of the political wheel. They can get just headlines. Internet sites will filter news based on a person's interests.

I worry that the plethora of news/information that is available today is actually making us a society that is less informed. We can't take everything in.

We used to rely on newspaper and broadcast editors to filter out the unimportant from the important. Now there is so much information available every day it would be impossible to read or listen to all of it in a 24-hour period.

We know a lot more, at least superficially, while at the same time we know a lot less on a deeper level.

It's hard to absorb things when we are on constant overload.

And then I wonder if some people even pay attention to what is going on.

The individual has always been responsible for needing to gather her own information. We in the media cannot spoon-feed you. Ignorance, while it's a choice, is not a viable excuse

killed

- 127 bloggers and netizens arrested

Source: *Reporters Without Borders*

for not knowing what is going on.

It is up to you where you get your news.

And people want their news for free. That worries me beyond the fact it can be a struggle to pay my bills. Philosophically it worries me because news organizations are continuing to make cutbacks. People, like in most professions, are the No. 1 expense of media companies. But if reporters and editors are let go, then who will provide the news? Where will our news come from in the next 10 years? Who will you trust to provide it to you? Would you even notice if *Lake Tahoe News* went away?

Whether the news is online or in print, it takes the same amount of resources to create the story. The difference between print vs. online is the printing costs; but rest assured there are expenses related to an online news site.

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Bringing people the news is not an easy job. It can even be a deadly one. In 2013, 71 journalists were killed.

It's certainly not a way to get rich.

Journalists have always been considered bottom feeders, right up there with lawyers and used car salesman.

We do it because we have a love for the truth. We want to hold people accountable. We want to tell your story, as well as the stories people don't necessarily want told but the public has a right to know.

It's a job that never ends. There's job security in that. But only if people are reading and willing to financially support their news source(s) of choice via cash as well as by supporting the advertisers.

World Press Freedom Day will not matter if the press no longer exists. Our existence, though, in many ways is out of our

hands. It's up to you – the reader.